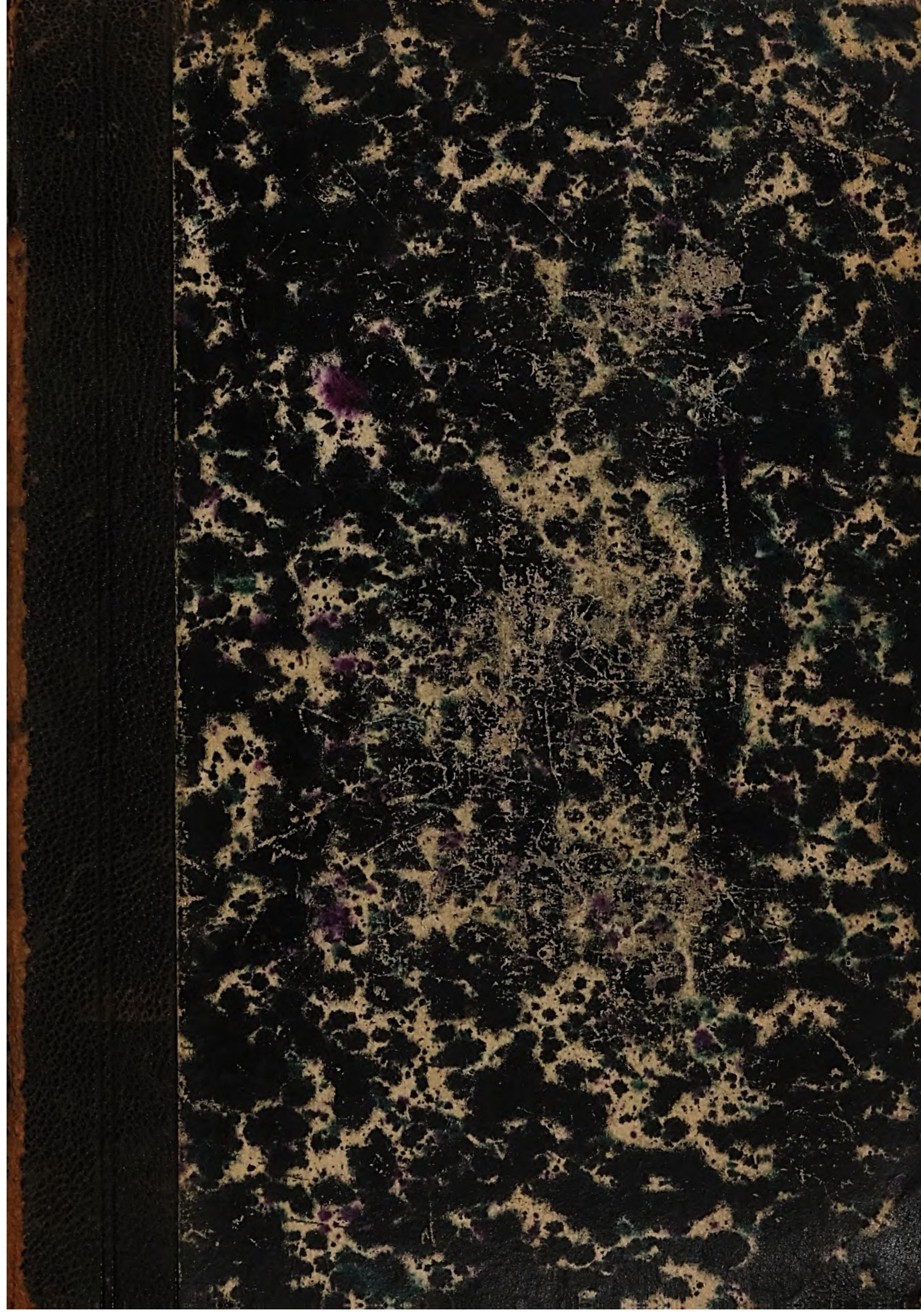




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VOL. 2714.

AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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AN OLD MAID'S LOVE BY MAARTEN MAARTENS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

A DUTCH TALE TOLD IN ENGLISH.

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS,

AUTHOR OF "THE SIN OF JOOST AVELINGH."

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1891.



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AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

A DIM, RELIGIOUS LIGHT.

THE great cathedral lay cool and silent under its softened masses of colour. High up, beyond dizzy aspiration, its grey arches faded into darkness, across the slender pillars and empty carved oak-benches broad stripes of many-tinted brilliance, great splashes of sunshine, fell like rainbows through the clouds. Here and there a figure moved in the dim distance, by the tiny yellow lights of the high altar, or a sombre-robed worshipper came slouching up the mighty aisle, and crept into one of the many pews, and was still. A bell tinkled somewhere over yonder, far away in the vastness, and a door banged discreetly, with a padded bang, near the entry. Over all the unfathomable sanctuary, with its wide forest of sombre pillars and its lofty walls of gorgeous

picturing, lay the holiness of eternal repose, eternal contemplation, eternal strength. And upon the soul of him that entered, fresh from the hurry and glare of the hot streets of the city, fell the silence and the shadow of the peace of God. And the infinite, that hath no beginning because it hath no ending, came for one moment and abode in his heart. For this temple of the Eternal, that, in its own majestic continuity, stands forth as one letter of the message of His greatness, links, even though it be but by brief adoration, the Power in whom is no variable-ness nor shadow of turning, to the children of an hour, whose life is as a dream. And they stream through, from the turmoil and back into the turmoil, and the holy place lies calm and solemn, with its message of infinitude, and in its presence a thousand years are like the glory of a summer morning, and a thousand hearts, with all their sorrow and all their thankfulness, are as a drop in the boundless ocean of the Eternal Love.

“Zee ze towers. Pootiful view from ze top. And ze treasure. Ze skulls of ze zree holy kings from ze Moors.”

Mighty shadows, broadening with every change of light, lay upon the chancel. An old priest, hardly discernible in the dimness, was shuffling about in the dark richly carved stalls; a little chorister was moving cushions to and fro, bobbing on one knee

each time he passed the altar. And still the sunbeams broke in their prismatic splendour across the vasty darkness, and a thousand slender shafts rose upwards from it, soaring one above the other, and carrying high into God's empyrean their unending song of silent praise.

"A word with you, if you please."

Arnout Oostrum was standing, with his hands in his pockets, staring at the uncouth dolls that are huddled together in a corner of the south transept. Somebody—a peasant-woman with a coloured shawl over her head—had knelt down before them and dropped into prayer. A scornful smile played over Arnout's face, subdued by the majesty of holy meditation that brooded over the entire temple, but breaking forth at times from the recklessness of his own heart. He was in no devotional mood. And the statues, it must be owned, are grotesque.

He turned round hastily, having recognised the voice, and faced Jakob te Bakel.

"No!" he said fiercely.

"Arnout," replied the other quietly, "you will not do me that wrong. Seeing that I am here, you will listen to me for a moment."

Arnout realised suddenly what the journey, short as it was, involved for his friend. The Dominé, as he knew, shrank with a sensitiveness that was almost disease, from exposing himself and his limp to the

notice of strangers, and, furthermore, it was not likely that on te Bakel's very limited budget a margin should have been left for unforeseen travelling expenses. He would have to economise on some necessary expenditure the sum he was now sacrificing on the altar of friendship.

"We all have our religions," thought Arnout, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he looked from the kneeling peasant-woman to the pale young parson; and he turned sullenly aside into an unfrequented corner, and waited for what was to come. He leant against the cool grey wall, in the shadow. And beyond the great gates of the chancel, in a silence broken by the occasional fall of reverent feet, waited the holy edifice, serenely solemn, under the ceaseless downpour of its changing light and shade.

"I am not going to discuss subjects with you," began Jakob, "which your heart had best discuss with itself. I am only going to ask you one or two questions. I have come here on purpose. And I trust you will answer them."

Arnout bent his head—hesitatingly—in doubtful acquiescence.

"You left Wyk—did you not, Oostrum—of your own free will and good pleasure?"

"Most certainly," said Arnout, with undue energy.

"So I understand. And you do not intend—at this present moment—to return to it?"

"Never!" replied Arnout more energetically still. And then he lapsed into his former sullen manner, and began striking his walking-stick against the side of his boot.

"You know, I suppose," continued te Bakel, "that, being a minor, you can be compelled to return."

"By whom?" asked Arnout scornfully.

"By those whom the law constitutes your natural guardians," answered the Dominé, somewhat at a loss.

"I have no guardian," said Arnout. "I once asked about it. She said it was not necessary to appoint one, as I can very well understand it is not, when a fellow has not a penny in the world."

Jakob was blundering. He hastened to shift his ground.

"True," he said. "You have not a penny in the world. How are you going to live?"

The blow struck home, and, therefore, it roused all Arnout's dormant irritation.

"I shall answer that question," he said angrily, "when I come to you for assistance. Is there anything more that you consider claims your interference?"

Te Bakel felt his helplessness against this rampart of cool resolve. "Yes," he said bluntly, "there is something more. Your aunt"—a thundercloud

crept over Arnout's forehead—"we will not speak of your aunt. She still lives. You may be glad to hear that." He paused.

"It is a matter of complete indifference to me," said Arnout, with a weary dignity which would have been intensely comical but for the pity of the thing. "She is dead to me, and will remain so."

A beautiful expression of reverent yearning came over the Domine's emaciated features.

"There are resuscitations," he said quietly. "Lazarus had been dead three days. And there are a good many things dead in your heart at this moment, Arnout, which Christ in His own good time may pass by to wake."

Arnout did not answer. He struck his stick against his boot. He looked bored.

"Do not let us speak of your aunt any more just now. You will never return to Wyk, you say. Well, it is the one corner of the earth where you will always be loved and always be made welcome. And Dorothy van Donselaar? Have you no message for her?"

"Yes," said Arnout; "tell her I am happier than I ever imagined possible."

"Happier!" echoed Jakob incredulously.

"Yes," replied Arnout, "happier. Go and tell her that if you choose."

"I do not choose," said Jakob indignantly. "To

begin with, I do not believe it; and, in the second place, you may look for another messenger to carry such an insult to the girl whom you have taught to love you, and whom you have deserted."

But his words, which he had expected to strike Arnout to the dust, were destined to produce the very opposite effect. They filled the young delinquent with righteous protestation.

"By the accusations which you bring against me," he said, speaking calmly enough in his disgust, "you prove how unfitted you are to call me to account. It is untrue that Miss van Donselaar loves me. On the contrary—and you see I am not ashamed to tell it—she has refused me."

"I do not doubt——" began Jakob.

"She has refused me before there was any question of intercourse between me and the Vicomtesse de Mongelas," Arnout went on, crushing down the other's opposition, and glorying in his own abasement. "She has refused me because, socially and financially, I was not worthy of her hand. I was a *mésalliance*—do you understand me?—and the Juffrouw van Donselaar does not approve of a *mésalliance*." He rejoiced in the words; they were music—wild, discordant music—to his soul.

"I know nothing of these matters," answered Jakob, grasping the situation with ready wit, "nor how far can go a father's authority or a daughter's

submission; but in my own heart I feel that she loves you, and that you have deserted her."

Arnout's face grew purple with passion and alarm. "You lie!" he said fiercely. "Coward, you lie!" Had he not been so strong, and the pastor so weak, I think he would have caught him by the throat and shaken him, despite the sacredness of the place in which they stood.

But Jakob, weak and nervous as he was, was still the last man to be bullied into submission.

"You tell me that I speak untruth," he said, throwing back his head, "because at this moment I come to you with a message from God. You recognise it; you reject it; and therefore you give the messenger the lie. It is the old story. You do not hurt the messenger, and the message remains. I leave it with you. By this dwelling-place of the Most High, in which we stand, by yonder cross uplifted for the redemption of all such as err, by the light of God amid the darkness, speaking at this moment in your heart, I leave it with you—may it remain with you, and torture you, and bring you comfort! She loves you, and you have deserted her."

He turned and went. Arnout caught him up before he had reached the chancel-gates.

"Do not think you have convinced me of the error of my ways," he said angrily. "You had much

better not have come. You have done far more harm than good. I don't believe you, and I am not afraid of you. And even if it were true, only it isn't, I should not care."

Jakob did not answer. He did not even turn once more to look upon his quondam friend. He could not. He limped away into the vast cathedral, behind a pillar, into the darkness, out of sight.

Arnout stood still, where the other had left him. He stood there for a long time, gazing down the aisle. The scarlet-coated "Swiss," attracted by his motionless figure, passed near him once or twice, and wondered what he was staring at. There was nothing amiss, as far as the Swiss could see. And for adoration his face was turned the wrong way. Perhaps these heretics prayed with their backs to the altar.

At length Arnout stirred and, looking up, saw the man watching him. He beckoned him towards him, and gave him a small piece of money. "This is a very fine old cathedral of yours," he said lightly. "I am a stranger in the town. Can you tell me where I could get a really good cigar?"

He was in one of those moods when a man's words and actions all lie outside himself.

Jakob te Bakel had left the cathedral and was

half-way across the Domplatz before he remembered why he had come to Cologne.

He had come, not to adjure Arnout or to accuse him, but to obtain an answer to that one question which he had suggested to Miss Varelkamp in taking leave of her. And he had not even asked it.

To return to Arnout he felt to be out of the question. And as no other opportunity of procuring information could possibly present itself, nothing remained for him but to take the train and depart. His excursion had proved fruitless.

He had now been in the city for barely two hours. On his arrival at the station, he had gone straight to the hotel close at hand, and having there boldly inquired for "Herr Oostrum," had been told that the gentleman had gone out, but that his sister, Madame la Vicomtesse, was in her room. He had declined to see Madame la Vicomtesse, and had followed monsieur into the cathedral. So far his pursuit, in its very bluntness, had been most successful. How could he have been so stupid as to forget the object of his coming? What had they talked about? He could only remember Dorothy Donselaar. He should have left that young lady out of the conversation altogether. He was no diplomat, he told himself with a dreary smile.

For one moment the idea suggested itself to him that he might attempt to obtain an interview with

Madame de Mongelas. But he recoiled from that idea immediately in terror and disgust. He had met the woman on two occasions only—the first, when Arnout carried her into the house subsequently to her accident; the second, when she was brought down before them all, just after the young student had asked Dorothy to be his wife. On neither occasion had te Bakel ventured to address her. His French was bad. His manners were bad. His knowledge of the world was very rudimentary, and his appreciation of such charming creatures as Madame de Mongelas was altogether a monstrosity. As for that lady's opinion of of him, she had summed it up very briefly to Arnout immediatly after their second meeting—

“I do not doubt, mon cher,” she had said, “that your friend is impossibly good, and that he achieves all manner of impossible things. He is impossible altogether. Pious! I will believe that he is pious. Il ne manquerais plus que ça avec un pareil masque de prêtre. He cannot help being pious, my dear chevalier, or his face would have been no good.”

No, it would be worse than useless for him to attempt an explanation with Madame de Mongelas. Fortunately, moreover, it would be impossible. She would refuse to see him, and by what title could he gain admittance? He walked across the square and down towards the hotel and the great bridge which spans the Rhine. He did not know where he was

going, and he did not much care. All the sights and sounds of these strange surroundings, which would otherwise have charmed him, now passed unheeded by. A square-faced tram-driver with a pancake-cap called out to him in German; he had nearly got entangled under the horses' feet. Somebody wanted to sell him photographs, or, if he would not have those, real eau-de-cologne. Half a dozen touts cried out their eternal question about the cathedral towers, and a small detachment of shabby-looking soldiers tramped past, hot and dusty, in their soiled linens, under the glare of the unclouded sun. He shrank back, on to the narrow footway, close under the windows of the hotel.

"It is you," she said, bending forward from her balcony, "Le pasteur! Come upstairs and see me. I want to talk to you—and to them all."

He looked up vaguely, as one who hears a voice in his dreams. And he saw the false Frenchwoman gazing down upon him, close by, on the first storey, just over his head. Her white arm hung over the side of the balcony; he noticed the sparkle of the massive gold band which encircled it.

"Come upstairs," she said imperiously. "Faites-vous annoncer. I am here under my own name. Of course."

He hesitated for a moment. "I will come, madame," he said. He walked round to the hotel

door, and, having found one of the waiters he told him in his shy, clumsy manner to take up the name of "Herr Pfarrer te Bakel" to the "Frau Burggräfin von Mongelas." He was very much perturbed by the prospect of the ordeal before him, yet he could not help smiling also at the thought of the strangeness of a *tête-à-tête* between so humble a personage as himself and the magnificent creature who had spirited away young Arnout Oostrum.

CHAPTER II.

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

HE had to wait for a few moments in the reading-room. Of course that room held the inevitable Englishman, close-shaven and well-brushed, with his check suit and crimson neck, swallowed up in a deep leather chair and a copy of yesterday's *Times*. Jakob had never seen a live Englishman. There are people still abroad, in out-of-the-way corners, who never have. He eyed him with considerable curiosity, having always heard so much evil of the race. He thought he had never come across so clean a creature before. He arrived at the conclusion that the man was sent out as an advertisement, like all things English, of somebody's soap.

He had to wait just long enough for Madame de Mongelas to arrange the disorder in which she received him. Madame de Mongelas was fond of simplicity, the kind of simplicity that costs a fortune to keep up. Despite her thirty odd summers she had not yet given over, for instance, wearing white sauts-du-lit, covered almost entirely with costly lace;

she could not bear putting on the same pair of light gloves twice, and she had a predilection for light gloves—till they went out of fashion. She enjoyed having plenty of roses in her sitting-room in winter, and when roses got too common towards summer-time, she could no longer endure them, but preferred orchids, whereby she showed that she had no vulgar tastes. Only she said she liked her pleasures in homœopathic doses, a little at a time, and that little good, which sounded very modest and reasonable, but which really meant that she opened half a dozen bottles of the costliest elixir of enjoyment, took a spoonful of each, and then threw away the rest.

“Sit down,” she commanded, as soon as te Bakel was ushered into her presence. “Sit down there, against the light, where you can see me. And sit still. I have something to say to you. And to all those good people. You understand?”

Jakob was silent. He did as the lady had bidden him. And then he waited for what was to come.

But, in the mean time, he could not help casting furtive half-frightened glances at the siren on the sofa. She was reclining in an easy abandonment; the injured foot—its dainty brown slipper a-glitter with beads—lay coquettishly installed on a square of blue satin, edged with swansdown, the soft folds of her muslin wrapper fell back from the slender

ankle, and her loose sleeve, as she lifted her hand to her hair with a graceful, careless movement, fell back also, almost to the shoulder, while the heavy band of massive gold slipped downwards half way to her elbow, flushing, as it passed, with a momentary play of colour the alabaster roundness of the arm. In her lap lay a heap of brilliantly coloured hothouse flowers; at her side, on a common hotel plate, were a couple of peaches half-hidden among leaves. She selected a scarlet cactus from her nosegay, and began plucking out some of its many stamina.

"I am very beautiful," she said to herself, "and I am a woman. Let me give him two minutes' time. We say most things, as a rule, we women, before we begin to speak."

In that softly shaded, softly perfumed room, with summer stealing silently, in a glitter of mellow warmth and sunlight, through the shelter of the closed Venetian blinds, with the far-away sounds of the city dying into dreamy music, and that beautiful woman on her sofa before him, among her laces and her flowers—in the languor, and the luxury, and the repose, the quiet clergyman felt creeping over him something of the sweetness of sin. He told himself, brusquely, that he could understand, in some faint measure, Arnout's folly, Arnout's madness, Arnout's crime. He clung to the last word. The nearer the young man's deed came to his heart, the more firmly

did he condemn, because he condoned, it. Arnout's crime. That was the end of it all.

Madame de Mongelas watched him, from the corners of her eyes, with ill-concealed amusement. She knew, with the instinct of her kind, that he was conscious of her beauty; even while he repelled it, she knew that he was conscious of it. From him she would neither expect a higher tribute, nor would she have desired one. To read in his patient eyes: "You are evil, and a thing to be feared. I fear you," was more than sufficient. And—woman that she was, she did not object to these smaller conquests—no conquest was too small to be sweet.

"Avow," she said, breaking the silence, "Monsieur le Pasteur, that I am not an ugly woman, and that your friend, in selecting me as an object of his homage, has at least shown his excellent taste."

The very calmness, the insolence of the thing—the coarseness, as he thought—fairly took his breath away. He did not know that in the society in which she was accustomed to move, such things "said themselves" between men and women. Still less did he know that she was carefully selecting her words, as she might have done in the presence of a girl like Dorothy, so as not to offend his prudery. She prided herself—and not unreasonably—upon her habitual moderation in frivolous speech, and she had often exposed herself in her own circle to the charge of

preciseness. She was not a woman with whom men took liberties, until she chose to permit them, and her house in Paris, as long as she had presided in it, was not one of those in which you said what you meant exactly as you meant it. You could say it, if you only knew how. And nobody does, except a Parisian. Te Bakel had never spent an hour with Madame de Mongelas's Parisian friends.

"Ah well," she said, "you are not polite. But I presume I may take your silence to mean consent. And avow, in any case, that if I am not beautiful, I am at least amiable. You come here, on purpose to take him away from me, and I—I call you into my presence, and I say to you that you are, at any rate, a faithful friend, and I offer you a glass of wine! Shall we drink his health?" She pointed, as she spoke, to a bottle of Rhenish wine standing on a side-table—"Steinberger Cabinet," by the way—at least, so the hotel wine-list said.

She was playing with him. He coloured uncomfortably, and moved in his chair. "Madame," he said gravely, "the man of whom you are speaking may be here at any moment. If you have anything to say to me, I beg of you to say it, and to let me go."

She looked him full in the face, and smiled. "No," she said, "he will not be back for some time

yet. I have told him to leave me for two hours and a half. You see that I have him under control."

"No doubt you have," cried Jakob, "or——" he checked himself.

"Or he would not have come with me? Ah Monsieur le Pasteur, forgive me that I say it, but you have not the manners of our abbés. It remains to be seen whether he would not have done so. Would you like him to tell you he is free?"

"No," said Jakob, "such avowal would be vain."

"You all think him a child," continued Madame de Mongelas. "He is young, I grant it you, and inexperienced; but he has the heart of a gentleman in him, and the making of a man. He will be a brave man yet, and a happy one, and you will all be proud of him—over yonder in your country of fish and frogs."

"Ah, madame," cried Jakob, piteously, folding his hands without knowing that he did it. "And do you say that, you, who are precipitating him into his ruin?"

She laughed out loud—a merry musical laugh, and she threw, with a light twist of the hand, her half-destroyed cactus-flower into the Domine's lap. "I beg of you," she said, "no tragedy! That is just what I wanted to speak to you about. Let us have no spoiling of sleeps and of digestions. I do not want to ruin anybody. Ruin! Fie! It sounds of

the Seine, and the Morgue, and the Petit Journal. Listen!" she went on more earnestly, "and let me say my little say. By-the-bye, do you know what passed between your good Miss Varelkamp and me on that Saturday night—the day before yesterday? Tiens—I am not mistaken—it was only the day before yesterday."

"No," said Jakob. "I do not."

"Very well. That is how I prefer it. When you go back to her, tell her I have forgotten it. We quarrelled, you understand, but I have forgotten the particulars. I could not repeat them to you, if you asked for them. Be sure to tell her that I bade you say I had forgotten."

"But, madame, that is hardly exact," said truth-loving Jakob. "Let me say that you are willing to forget."

"Ciel, qu'il est assommant!" she cried with heartfelt conviction. "Tell her, then, that I do not recall it. Que je ne me rappelle rien. Voilà. And now understand also clearly," she went on, "and let your friends understand with you, that there is to be no question of ruining my little Arnout. Financially, if I am rightly informed—and the poor boy is delightfully sincere—there is nothing to ruin. He was born, as it appears to me, 'sold up'—'flambé,' from his mother's—ahem—berceau—is it not so?"

"He has certainly not a penny in the world," said Jakob with eager candour.

"I know it," she answered; "but that, in this case, will prove of no importance. I have money enough for the present, and he is welcome to his share of it as long as it lasts. Ah, bah! my theory with money has ever been that when it is all gone there will always be more. We shall not trouble la tante for money; you can tell her that too, if you like. And you can tell dear Tante Croesus; I always appreciated Tante Croesus. She might have been a charming woman, with better opportunities, and less of that bourgeois love of cash. I suppose," she said, suddenly changing her tone, and looking him again full in the face with those beautiful eyes of hers that troubled his timid soul, "I suppose, Monsieur le Pasteur, that you think me an adventuress—hein?"

He coloured again, and looked away.

"Look me in the face," she said, so imperiously that he could not but obey. His eyes were fascinated and drawn towards her. She held him by her very consciousness of power. "The woman of the Bible? Mary Magdalen, minus the penitence and plus the devils—dites?"

He did not answer, but he sat stupidly staring at her—hot, flushed, weary, utterly uncomfortable.

"You are mistaken," she said coolly, and she

took her eyes off him mercifully and released him. "You are breaking one of the commandments at this moment, Monsieur le Révérend. I do not know the number, but it says that you should not suppose villainous things of your neighbour, nor of your neighbour's wife, nor even of any of the animals in your neighbour's stables or basse-cour. But I forgive you, because it is only natural, and we cannot expect you to be as good as you think you are. We must not be exorbitant, and that would be asking too much. But I am not an adventuress. My name is exactly what I say it is, and I have never used an *alias* in my life. You see I have not done so even here; I have merely said, 'Arnout is my brother.' And you will not deny the truth of that, I presume. Do you not call us your 'chers frères' a hundred times in the course of one 'prêche?' I should like to hear you preach, my dear pastor. Perhaps you would convert me, and then I could eat meat on Fridays, and perhaps I would marry a Protestant abbé. Ce serait une fin, ça, comme une autre. Ça ne manquerait pas, au moins, d'originalité. But the name I bear, my good monsieur, is one of the oldest in France, and the title which so charmed your fat widow is as genuinely and legally mine as if it still could procure me the 'grandes entrées' at Versailles. Not that I should have coveted those, no, nor obtained them. I am of another surrounding—

I!—I prefer les ‘petites sorties’—là où les gens du monde ne vont pas.

“So far, so good. And now with regard to my little Arnout.” She took a peach from the plate, and began negligently peeling it with her rosy-tipped fingers. “My compliments—the compliments of Madame la Vicomtesse de Mongelas—to the good friends at Wyk, and I cannot abandon my preux chevalier. I am going to keep him for a little, only for a little, until we are tired of each other, and then I am going to send him back to you, and you can kill the fatted calf. By-the-bye, you might begin to fatten him already. It would occupy you, en attendant, and it is impossible to say how soon the crisis may come.”

Tears of spite and helpless regret came into Jakob’s eyes. He bowed his head on his hand so that she might not see them.

She noticed the movement, and paused, poising her peach between finger and thumb. “Mon ami,” she said, “I have pained you. Forgive me. But how strange you are in your country! I think the damp must make you so inclined to melancholy. Your souls are like sweet cakes, full of goody-goodies, that will not rise. Now what harm is there—I entreat of you—in what I am doing? I am forming your young collégien; I am making a man of him. Your old maid ought to be grateful to me, instead of complaining.”

"You are—to mention one thing only—destroying his career for good," said the minister sullenly.

"Ah, bah, his career! La soutane! He is not fitted for it, not even in the country where you marry your priests, and where, consequently, they have not the pleasure of an intrigue. He will choose something else, something better. Le panache, for instance! Voilà!"

"And then the wickedness—the sin," stammered Jakob, faltering not from any false shame, but from the very weight of the holiness of the words addressed to so frivolous a creature.

"The wickedness!" she repeated. "The sin! Le pêcher? Le fruit défendu? J'y mords." And she bit with her pearly teeth into the peach which she held in her hand. "It is a very good one," she added. "Will you try the other? But I cannot promise it will be as good. One never can, you know, with peaches. And, besides, tastes differ. Now, I like my pleasures, when I can get them, to have just the slightest taste of theft. And you probably, you like to buy them for current coin of the realm, at the nearest flower-stall."

Jakob often did not even understand her French, far less her meaning. He mildly answered that he had few pleasures, and that he abhorred all such as were evil in the sight of God.

"Do not preach to me," she said vehemently. "Tell them once for all, that I shall keep the boy for a little. Why? you ask. Because—a woman's Because. I have not lost my heart to him. Miss Dorothy need not be afraid of that. I am too old, and too experienced. And he—he is very much épris at this moment, but it is not so much of me as of life, which I represent to him. He is going to have a good time. I shall take care of him. And when it is over, I shall send him back guéri, and he will marry Miss Dorothy and have half a dozen children. It is the finale. I predict it. And they will be much happier—mark my words—much happier than they would have been if they had married before I had intervened."

"And you?" said Jakob.

"And I? They will invite me to the wedding, but I shall not come. I? What matters it to you? Why do you ask? Qui vivra verra."

"Madame," said Jakob, rising, "I have listened to you patiently, as you must admit. I have received your messages. I shall take them to my friends. They are messages, remember that, to hearts which are torn by the most terrible suffering. Two women whose lives you have trampled on and destroyed in sheer wantonness, these are your helpless victims; and your words will come to them like

taunts. I will shield them as much as is in my power. Of that you may rest assured."

The vicomtesse cast her flowers to the ground with a sudden movement of impatience. "But what, then, in Heaven's name, do they expect of me?" she cried. "To sacrifice everything for nothing? Je ne veux pas. The one woman has refused him! What does she offer him if I let him go? Answer me that." She started up from her couch. "You, her champion, answer, if you dare. Buy him back, if you can do it. Will she marry him—now?"

"I cannot answer that," said Jakob.

"Your lips say: 'I know not,' your eyes say, 'No.' There remains his aunt. The tender mercies of his aunt! We know them. I like the boy. I do not love him, but he pleases me. He is a good boy, deserving of better things than Wyk and Miss Varelkamp, and the caprices of Miss Dorothy Donselaar. In his own interest, no. I will not let him go. Adieu, Monsieur le Pasteur, our conference is at an end, I fancy. You must have patience. Patience is a fine virtue, and in such a flat country as Holland, you can see a long way from the housetops. I used to call your dear old lady 'la tante s'use,' because she worked herself to death for her rogue of a nephew. Now I shall merely call her, 'l'attente,' for she must look out for him henceforth during the next month or so. Is your French equal to my poor

little jeu de mots? Yes? I am glad of that. I detest calembours, but somehow I must always make them in your presence. It is good that we do not see much of each other, Monsieur l'Abbé. In your company I fear I should become a very bad woman. And I am not that. No—really, truthfully—I am not that. But you are too good for me, and you draw me on. Vous m'agacez. Vous êtes un empêcheur de danser en rond. Shake hands, mon cher, and do not let us bear malice. It is not such a misfortune, perhaps, as you think, for you old-fashioned frumps that I came down among you like a whirlwind. Nay, but shake hands. What, you will not? Ah, monsieur, vous êtes plus méchant que moi.”

“You are—too charming, madame,” he blurted out, and ran away.

His question was answered.

CHAPTER III.

MEVROUW BARSSELIUS GIVES A PARTY.

"TAKE your seats. Take your seats. Come on to the sofa, Suzanna," said Mevrouw Barsselius, bustling about, as fast as her rotundity allowed her, in the stiffest of black silks. The covers had been taken off the red-velvet chairs in the drawing-room, and the wax flowers had been carefully dusted out with a camel-hair brush under their shining glass-shades. There was no unseemly air, however, of festivity; there was only solemnity, and dignity, and expectation.

On the great round table stood, right in the middle of dark crimson cloth, a big newly burnished, newly filled double inkstand, with gleaming, unused pens. And in front of it lay a clean pink blotting-pad, also unused, and also expectant, like the inkstand, and the red-velvet chairs, and the hot face of Mevrouw Barsselius.

Round the table sat, in various attitudes of awkwardness, Juffrouw Varelkamp, Juffrouw van Donselaar, and Dominé te Bakel. Mevrouw Barsselius was in

high spirits. She was enjoying herself thoroughly. She was going to make her will.

"Adelaida is late," said Mevrouw Barsselius, as the great gilt clock on the mantelpiece—in front of the great gilt mirror—struck eleven. "Your father would not approve of Adelaida's unpunctual habits, Dorothy."

"He does not approve of mine," said Dorothy with a smile.

"You can afford to be unpunctual," said the widow with some asperity. "Adelaida cannot, being a pensioner."

As she spoke, the door opened and the expected guest came in, also admitting Bijou who sneaked under the table under cover of her skirts.

Adelaida—otherwise Mejuffrouw Vonk—was a spinster of fifty, with a long body, a long nose and a squint. She was very indignant at the squint, although—in reality—it had become almost a blessing to her, as it supplied her with a satisfactory explanation of her spinsterdom, which left her temper and her sniff out of the reckoning. She was a friend of Mevrouw Barsselius's childhood. "We have been friends," she told everybody—especially those who knew her best, "for the last thirty years at the least. In fact, ever since we were babies together." Worldly means she had not been blest with, she said (and everybody could see that), but a contented mind had

fallen to her share (this was not so plain to the people about her). She came and dined every day with Mevrouw Barsselius, the condition being that she should stay with her all the evening till half past ten and read to her while she slept. "I am glad to be able to provide the poor thing with one good meal a day," said the widow. "And I'm sure I don't grudge her my evenings," said Miss Vonk. So they were happy together, evening after evening—happiest when they quarrelled, which they very often did.

And—up to a certain point—the poor pensioner ruled her patroness by allowing that lady to bully her as much as she chose.

"You are late, Adelaida," remarked the widow with some asperity. "If the notary had not been late also, I should not have admitted you at all."

"I have not my time at my command, like more favoured mortals," answered Mejuffrouw Vonk, as she presented her leathern cheek to Miss Suzanna.

It was one of Miss Vonk's fallacies that she was busy because she was poor.

"I lock the door as soon as the notary arrives," went on Mevrouw Barsselius, without taking any notice of a remark she had heard at least fifty times before. "And I have arranged everything with cook about the tradespeople, and so we shall be quite undisturbed." These last words she addressed to Miss

Suzanna, who bowed her head without hearing them. Miss Vonk felt offended at their not having been specially destined for her, as the dinner, if it was anybody's business, more particularly belonged to her province.

Before she could think of anything spiteful to remark—very shortly, therefore—the notary was ushered in, a bald old gentleman, with a lisp, which he cultivated, because he considered it courtly. He brought his assistant—the candidate, as they call him—and his permanent witness, whom he ordered to wait outside. The candidate, as it happened, was a gentleman by birth, a lack-a-daisical young Jonker, exceedingly bored by his preparatory service. However, he espied Dorothy's sweet face, on entering, and brightened up wonderfully under its influence.

"It is your express wish, as I understand it, mevrouw, that all these persons should be present on this occasion. You know that such a proceeding is very unusual," said the notary, as he settled his spectacles, and tried all the pens in succession on his thumbnail. Mevrouw Barsselius watched this process with growing anxiety.

"Yes, mynheer the notary," she answered; "I wish to have no mystery about the matter. I am very peculiarly placed. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to explain——"

The notary waved his hand deprecatorily.

"And still it may be better to put things clearly. I like the dots on my *is*. Are the pens not suitable, mynheer the notary?"

"They will do," said the notary, not wishing to commit himself.

"You gentlemen, of course, are what I call 'no thoroughfare.' Whatever may go in at one side of the head, nothing ever comes out at the other."

"We lawyers," said the notary blandly, "are the priests of Themis, mevrouw. The doctor is the confessor of your body, the parson is the confessor of your soul, and the lawyer is the confessor of your mind, if I may so put it, of your intelligence, mevrouw."

"Ha!" thought the candidate, "has it come already? He brought it out early this time." He smiled knowingly to Dorothy, and was rather disconcerted by her not returning the smile.

"I object, sir," interposed Jakob boldly, "to the separation you establish between soul and intelligence. The two are indissolubly linked."

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Mevrouw Barsselius in alarm. They had come together to talk about her and her affairs. Every other subject was tabooed.

"I wish to state clearly," she began again, "why I have asked you all to be present. There must be no disputes, if you please, after *my* death. And I will not have Suzanna saying, for instance, that my

mind was unsound because she is disappointed in my last will and testament."

"Sister!" interrupted Miss Varelkamp indignantly.

"Silence!" cried the widow, striking her fat hand on the table, and looking down complacently on its many rings. "Mynheer the notary, if it is my testament, has anybody a right to talk but myself?" She was enjoying herself immensely.

"Madam," said the notary, a little peevishly, "let us proceed to business. You wish these ladies to remain in the room, then so be it. Kindly relate to me as briefly as possible, what are the principal dispositions you wish to make with regard to your property, that the two witnesses here present may be able to judge in how far they are in harmony with the draft which I here deposit on the table."

He lisped over the words as if repeating them by rote—as, indeed, must have been the case. This was the opportunity for which Mevrouw Barsselius had waited. She was not a novice in the engrossing art of will-making, and she knew that Dutch law requires this verbal statement as a prelude to the final reading and signing of the document. She hem'd and ha'd and then she sat twiddling her thumbs and looking from one to the other of her assembled friends. It was with regret that she noticed that only Adelaida seemed to be taking any

special interest in the proceedings. She vowed in her heart that she would wake them up.

"Will you use the draft as a guide?" asked the notary, holding it out to her across the table.

"No, thank you," she said sharply. "On such an important subject I have my thoughts about me quite clearly enough. I have the misfortune," she continued, assuming a plaintive air, "to be the only person in my family who is blessed with a certain amount—a moderate amount—of worldly goods. I do not regret the possession; what I regret is their absence as regards other people. It would be a far more comfortable arrangement, notary, if in families everybody had money enough."

The notary bowed his head majestically several times and drummed his white fingers on the table. The candidate laughed, and then coughed to hide it, and looked embarrassed.

"And yet I don't know," added the widow meditatively; "there wouldn't be much pleasure or use in having money, if everybody had it. At any rate, I've got it; and the one question concerning it which is of interest to everybody except myself is just simply this: What will become of it, and who will have it, when I die? The answer is not"—said the widow, darting round with malicious emphasis—"Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk."

"God forbid it should be!" cried the spinster

with great presence of mind. "I shall be cold in my grave with trouble many years before you think of slipping into yours, Annemarie. But you'll have to come to it, none the less, Annemarie."

Mevrouw Barsselius was as indignant and as flurried as if the other really possessed the power of accelerating her departure. "I shall do as I choose"—she said incontinently, "and I shall have as many real mourners at my funeral as I possibly can. I intend therefore, notary, to leave to Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk—*spinster*—my green plush arm-chair, the one she is sitting in at this moment, as a memorial of the fact that she has sat in it regularly every evening since she began to dine at my table four years ago come next seventeenth of March. Have you put that in, notary?"

"Yes," said the notary, waking up.

"And I furthermore leave to the said Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk, the egg-boiler which she presented to me on my last birth-day but one. As she says that she can boil eggs with it, and as she probably is the only person in the world who can do so, it seems only right that she should possess it after my death. I would give it to her immediately, only that I do not wish to appear inconsiderate."

The candidate burst into audible laughter. Mevrouw Barsselius stopped. Her intense enjoyment was not of the kind which finds vent in hilarity,

and she took this levity of an official personage altogether amiss. "Heer Notary!" she said in protest. The notary frowned at his thoughtless assistant. The assistant himself looked for encouragement to the other young people. Dorothy's face wore an expression of disgust. The minister was not listening.

"I am not going to sit here to be made a laughing-stock of," began the spinster excitedly. She shot indignant glances at te Bakel, but that was mere accident, not design, for she aimed them at the widow. "May I ask, is that all as regards me?"

"Yes, that is all, Adelaida," answered the widow, folding her hands over her bosom.

"Then there is just this to add," continued Miss Vonk, "'and, furthermore, to the said Adelaida, a pension of one hundred florins a year to be paid in monthly instalments. Mynheer the notary, will you kindly add that without delay.'"

"Madame," said the notary with dignity, "I can take no instructions from any one but the testatrix."

"You see, Adelaida, you can't do it," cried Mevrouw Barsselius in triumph. "I told you you couldn't."

"It is a scandal," cried the spinster. "She has promised it me a hundred times. You know you have, Annemarie!"

"Yes," replied Annemarie, "but then, that was

before you broke my best Japanese slop-basin, and before you said you wished I was dead."

"They were accidents, both of them," cried the spinster, bursting into tears. "And the slop-basin has been so carefully mended that no one could see it if you didn't know. I had it done myself, and it cost me seven florins and seventy-five cents."

"Well, ma'am, what do you care about the matter?" interposed the irrepressible candidate, "if you are going to die before the testatrix, anyway?"

"Silence! Dorsveld," cried the notary peremptorily.

"Mevrouw Barsselius, will you kindly continue, or I shall have to leave before your business is concluded? You bequeath to your servants—go on."

Mevrouw Barsselius had been much moved by the sight of Adelaida's tears. "Well," she said, "on consideration, you may put in that legacy."

"Madame," replied the notary, "I wish, then, that you had instructed me to do so sooner. Additions are very annoying, now that the deed is made out."

"Well, Adelaida, if it can't be done, it can't," said the widow. "You must settle it with the Heer Notary.—To my servants I leave a pension of twenty-five florins for each year they have been in my service, and to my sister, Suzanna Varelkamp, I leave the dear companion of my loneliness, Bijou, with a

pension of five hundred florins yearly as long as he lives."

Once more she looked round triumphantly. Suzanna's wandering thoughts had been recalled by the mention of her name.

"Thank you," she said indifferently. "I shall take care of him, if he and I survive you, Annemarie."

"He won't," said Annemarie. "Did you ever hear of a dog that lived five and twenty years? He's wheezy already. Never mind. It'll be another Bijou. —The rest of my property goes back to my husband's family." She waited a moment to enjoy the full effect of this announcement. But her audience was unappreciative. "I never told you that, Suzanna."

"No," said Suzanna.

"Except my savings, which are considerable. These I had formerly bequeathed in their entirety to my so-called nephew, Arnout Oostrum, who is no nephew of mine."

"Annemarie," interposed Mejuffrouw Varelkamp, now entirely aroused to the proceedings, "surely that has nothing to do with the matter. I should wish you, if possible, to leave it out."

"But that shows you know nothing about law," objected Mevrouw Barsselius confidently. "I had to tell the notary exactly, for in legal matters such in-

accuracies are fatal. Is it not so, Heer Notary? And, besides, your secret is tiresome and useless. It is not a real secret, of any interest to anybody, about a large fortune or a changeling, or anything of that sort. It bores me. It is just the kind of humdrum unprofitable secret you would naturally have, Suzanna; and now that the boy turns out a hopeless disgrace, I would much rather have it known that he in no way belongs to our family. I do not really know why I left, or still want to leave him, any of my money, only he is a plucky boy, and a handsome boy, and I thought I might as well do you the pleasure of letting him have it, as there was nobody else. I have been well rewarded." She unexpectedly began to cry. Perhaps the emotional pastime she was indulging in tried her nerves more than she realized.

She wiped her eyes with her best cambric handkerchief, carefully letting the embroidered monogram fall to the front, and then she said in a whining tone, "I bequeath the rest of my possessions to Arnout Oostrum, and I make him my heir, on condition that within three weeks from the date of this will and testament he be once more an inmate of the house of Mejuffrouw Suzanna Varelkamp, and that within one year from the same date aforesaid he be married to Mejuffrouw Dorothy van Donselaar."

Dorothy changed colour. She began to under-

stand why she had been asked to be present at this extraordinary ceremony.

“And if he do not fulfil these conditions, I direct that my property shall go to the foundation of a charitable fund for the poor of the village of Wyk, in which I was born and educated, according to the clauses enumerated in my will, and I appoint as first administrators of the said fund the minister of the parish, Dominé te Bakel, and my charitable young friend, Miss Dorothy van Donselaar. I don't like you, te Bakel, but I believe you are a very conscientious man. You are tiresomely conscientious, and that is what one wants in a trustee.”

“I have pointed out to Mevrouw Barsselius,” began the notary, “that a trusteeship vested in a woman——”

“Yes, I know,” said the widow, “and so the best thing you can do, my dear, is to marry Arnout Oostrum as soon as possible.”

“Mevrouw,” said Dorothy with some spirit, “I do not doubt that your intentions are excellent, but I cannot say that they are agreeable. If I have any influence in the matter, you will leave my name altogether out of your plans.”

“But you have no influence, my dear,” said the widow. “Everybody must let me do exactly as I like—is it not so, notary?—and I am the only person who has anything to decide in the matter.”

"My legacy, however, is an understood thing," said Juffrouw Vonk, "or I don't dine in this house to-night."

"And if you don't," cried the widow, bridling, "there will be three lamb-cutlets for me, instead of two, that's all. No; now I come to think of it, I shan't let you have a legacy. You'll poison my soup, if you know it's to bring you in a hundred florins a year."

Mejuffrouw Vonk opened her mouth wide, too indignant for immediate speech.

"Silence! ladies," said the notary hastily. "If you will allow me, I will now proceed to read out the will."

"Perhaps," said Dorothy van Donselaar, "if our presence is no longer required——"

"Yes, it is," cried Mevrouw Barsselius gleefully. "I want every one to make sure that matters stand as I have said. Oh yes, by-the-bye—I have forgotten one provision. If Arnout succeeds to the property, then Dominé te Bakel is to have a legacy of five hundred florins. You put that in, Heer Notary, did you not?"

"Yes, yes; you shall hear;" said the notary, and he once more adjusted his spectacles, and began to read.

Mevrouw Barsselius accompanied every wearisomely rounded sentence with nods of approval and

blinks of the eyelids. Sometimes she closed them for full five seconds of placid enjoyment. Sometimes she tapped her fingers on the table. And sometimes she said "juist" (exactly) so emphatically that the notary looked up and frowned.

In the middle of the reading came a loud knock at the door. The notary paused, and directed an inquiring gaze upon the mistress of the house. But that lady frowned, and waved her hand with a majestic gesture of disapproval. So the notary resumed his unattractive drone.

"Furthermore this testatrix testifieth that the aforesaid legatee shall be entitled to the receipt of the aforesaid legacy on or before any such date as——"

"Mevrouw!" called out a shrill voice behind the closed door, "the butcher says that he can't let you have any lamb cutlets this morning; but he says that if you will take a nice little sweetbread——"

Mevrouw Barsselius was off her sofa with amazing nimbleness. She had thrown open the door, and disclosed a pink-frocked and red-faced maid-servant behind it. "Beast!" she said, "hold your tongue!" Then she slammed-to the door, and hurried back to her corner, where she lay gasping for breath.

"Scratch out the name of Pieterel Jaspers from the will," she said, as soon as she could speak. The

notary hesitated. "Scratch it out," she cried imperiously. "The pigs shall obey me, or I'll know the reason why." By which forms of speech you will perceive that Mevrouw Barsselius was not a socialist. She was not that form of tyrant.

The reading of the will came to an end at last and—all necessary changes having been effected—the important moment arrived for appending the signatures. Mevrouw Barsselius literally revelled in this final scene. She took out her spectacle-case from her black silk bag, and then she extracted her spectacles out of the case, and then she rubbed and re-rubbed the glasses during several minutes, and then she dropped her handkerchief on the ground, and te Bakel had to pick it up for her, and in doing so, he trod on Bijou's tail, and Bijou yelped, and Mevrouw Barsselius abused him, and then she rubbed her spectacles over again, and indulged in a fresh altercation with Miss Vonk about that lady's legacy, and then she selected pens and bit them and laid them down again, and at last, when the exasperated notary openly laid down his watch on the table, she carefully inscribed her name—beginning in the wrong place in spite of repeated indications—— "Anna Maria Varelkamp, Widow Dr. R.K.P. Barsselius." She finished very slowly and elaborately, with a flourish that ended in a spurt

and a dozen tiny blots; and then sat contemplating her handiwork, her whole face aglow with pleasure and content.

"Nothing remains now," she said, looking placidly round, as the notary and his assistants appended their signatures, "but my death to give the document its full effect. But you must not reckon too positively on that. I intend, as I have often told you, to live for five and twenty years longer. I reckon that is my measure, and I don't think I'm far out. I've a right to live five years longer than my father did, for I've had an easier life. And I can make a new will to-morrow, can't I, Heer Notary?"

"You can, certainly," said the notary. "But if you do, I should advise you to do so less publicly, mevrouw."

"I don't intend to make another," said Mevrouw Barsselius bluntly. "It is too expensive, thank you. And I purposely wished to select this manner once for all, so that everybody might know exactly what they had to expect and what they had to do. And therefore I think I should like to add a postscript; 'that I leave the legacy to Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk, on condition of her never again saying an ungrateful thing to me as long as I live.'"

"You can't add a postscript," said the lawyer testily; "and, besides, the clause isn't valid. How is

one to find out whether you consider the lady to have said such a thing or not?"

"A codicil, of course, I mean," answered the widow huffily. "I shall tell on my deathbed. Of course I shall die of my asthma. And I shall have breath enough left to tell about that."

"You can't leave money in a codicil either, madam," said the lawyer; "but I can add a paragraph to this deed if you wish it. For the last time, I must ask you: Do you wish this legacy to be included or not?" And he began looking for his hat as he spoke.

"Stay!" cried the spinster, stretching out her lean arm. "For the last time, Annemarie, shall your conscience speak?"

"Oh, bother," said Mevrouw Barssselius, with a grin. "Put it in, but say that she's only to have it on condition of the head-undertaker's deciding that she has wept sufficient tears at the funeral."

She clung to this compromise, in spite of the attempts of all present to dissuade her; and ultimately the notary was compelled to inscribe it in the deed. He gave a groan of relief, as he hurried out of the house.

"An awful woman," he said to the candidate, "if there were two such women among my clients, I would give up the work."

But the candidate laughed all the way home.

"And the little Miss What's her Name, sir," he said. "Did you notice her? A very pretty girl!"

"I never notice such things in business hours," said the old notary severely, "nor should you."

"And so the best thing you people can do," began the widow, as soon as the men of law had retired, "is to combine all your efforts to get back Arnout Oostrum in three weeks from to-day. If you don't—whist!" she blew an expressive breath from the tips of her fingers—"so much the better for the poor of the village of Wyk."

"And do you really think, woman," burst out Suzanna, with concentrated indignation, "that either that innocent girl there," she pointed to Dorothy, "or your faithful friend, or I, want the inducement of your beggarly pence to do what we can to save the soul of Arnout Oostrum? Do you know what it is to feel love? Can you imagine that I would not give my heart's blood or my soul's peace to rescue him? Your legacy forsooth! Your savings! I would not touch them! Shall a man barter a soul for gold?"

"Suzanna, how dare you speak to me like that!" cried the widow in a condition that can only be described as "flabbergasted." "I should order you to leave the room but that I imagine that the disgrace and the annoyance have turned your head. I

have a great mind to go to the notary to-morrow and leave Bijou to Adelaida."

"Who would not have him," said Adelaida. "It is you who will weep at my funeral, Annemarie. Bitter, unavailing tears for a true friend most cruelly wronged." She brushed out her old-fashioned mantilla, as she rose to take leave.

"Well?" queried Mevrouw Barsselius, "are you coming to dinner, or not?"

Adelaida did not choose to give a direct answer. "I am of a forgiving spirit," she said, "and I am accustomed to suffer injustice. You know it, and you treat me accordingly. Farewell!"

"Come, Dorothy, let us also go," said Suzanna. "Annemarie, I have always striven to be a good sister to you. I would be so still, but endurance has its limits. And I may tell you frankly, as I told you a day or two ago, that far from striving to recall my poor Arnout, I have written to him, entreating him, commanding him to stay. If he once leave the woman, he will desert her. And he must marry her—do you understand?—he must marry her. What I can do to effect this purpose, I shall do—I am doing. So you may well congratulate the poor of Wyk. Your miserable money goes to them."

Miss Adelaida Vonk had paused near the door to listen.

"Lawk-a-daisy-me!" she said at the end of this

tirade. She said it in Dutch. She said, "Oh, little Augusta mine!" if anybody cares to know.

"Yes," said Dorothy. "Let us go, too, dear Miss Varelkamp. "It is, as you say, but poor Mevrouw Barsselius doesn't understand."

The widow began to cry. "You are all against me," she said, "and you are very unkind, and you spoil my pleasure. I'm sure I try to do what I can. He isn't even a relation of mine, and I leave him all my money. And, seeing how stupid you are about him, I thought of this clever plan to force you to act like reasonable creatures. And I *won't* leave my money to Madame de Mongelas. And I don't believe she is a viscountess, or anything. And he can't marry her! He shan't marry her! Suzanna, you're very wicked, and quite crazy, and Barsselius always said I was a very good woman of business. And I wish I had left all my money to Adelaida Vonk."

"She does not wish for it," said Adelaida solemnly. "And yet she would have used it well."

"I must in all honesty repeat," interposed Jakob, "as Miss Varelkamp is aware, that I share the opinion of Mevrouw Barsselius. I have seen the woman, and spoken with her at length. He cannot marry her. She does not wish it; and he cannot."

"He must," said Suzanna fiercely. "What, then,

would you have this nameless abomination become, in which he has lived with her hitherto? He shall hallow it; he shall purify it; and all men will say that he did right." She laid her hand on Dorothy's arm, and together they left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUN IN HIS ZENITH.

It was a glorious morning in July. They were out on the terrace together, the beautiful marble terrace overlooking the lake. Above them, far away into immensity, glittered the cloudless sky—a sparkle of pale blue and paler silver; at their feet, encased by majestic walls of towering granite, shone the vast sheet of water, smooth, silent, yet restless, a-quiver with ten thousand diamond stars 'neath the ceaseless movement of the early sun. The terrace on which they sat hung halfway against the mountain, like a white bird arrested in his flight; behind them rose the dusky olive-gardens, clouded with heat, speckled here and there by cottages or bits of stone wall, and topped by a tiny yellow sanctuary, that shone out among the trees.

The sun had as yet barely lifted his head over the side of yon dark ridge which cuts the receding sky. A little tremble of a breeze, barely a breath to stir the sleeping perfumes, played idly round the roses which clung, massed in great patches of crim-

son and yellow, against the white walls and over the marble parapet. And they, opening their bosoms to every touch of invigorating life, cast forth their fragrance on an air already heavy with sweetness. There were flowers everywhere, in bright, many-coloured masses, scattered over the garden that sank downwards to the lake; and great jagged lines of blooming aloe and cactus ran cross-ways over the slopes. It was beautiful, if you will—nay, it was surpassingly beautiful, but its beauty was the beauty of fire, of madness, of crime—of all things fierce and fair. Even at that early hour, before the day had well begun, there lay over the whole earth, over the gleaming stones, and the white olives, and the glittering expanse of air and water—the hot glare of a vitality too intense to last. Nature was bursting with her own luxuriance, sinking beneath the weight of her own fertility, slaying herself. Only by the unresting care of many gardeners could the flowers of this favoured garden still be kept from shrivelling into shreds, and even they, if this splendour of sunshine were to continue, would soon lie dead beneath its strength. Even the blue lake, burning like polished steel, could bring no thoughts of coolness to the soul; nor did any spot of tranquil verdure offer repose to the eye in search of shade. Already the lizards were out, crazy on the baking pavement, already the cicadas, and the grasshoppers, and the

thousand and one animals that never sleep, were crawling forth in search of breakfast as a reward for the labours of the night. And over all the landscape, and over the soul of man, lay the overwhelming glory of a consuming fire, that leaves no strength for action, and yet brings no calm for thought, the madness of an energy that feeds upon itself, and that, quivering with its own intensity, can neither wake as they that work, nor sleep as they that rest.

They were out on the terrace then together, she reclining in a long-drawn rocking-chair, he on a crimson strip of carpet at her feet, his yellow head against her knee, his hand in hers. With eyes half closed under the brilliancy of sunshine, and thoughts enchained by the plenitude of beauty—half dreaming, half awake, and wholly fascinated, too weary for pleasure, yet too happy to be weary, engrossed in self and in each other, and dead to all that lay outside this sweetness and this languor, suspended amid the fall of time in the eternity of a moment, yet troubled by a ripple of remembrance that even such eternities must pass, and regretting, idly and unconsciously, that no human ecstasy can pass beyond the effort of enjoying into such placid depths of full fruition that we no longer need to feel our bliss. The occasional flutter of the roses—faint and unrefreshing as it was—tormented Arnout's heart. It

spoke of movement, and of things that come and go. And he longed to recall the monotonous croak of the little green frogs at night, without beginning, without ending, eternal, unbroken, ever the same. He looked forth dreamily on the ripple of the water, tideless, unvailing, unaltering, up and down, from nowhere to nowhere, on and on. And the wide radiance of heaven sank down upon him, omnipresent, omniluculent, never beyond its own effulgence, yet never fathomed by its own immensity. And the deep ocean of the human soul stirred gently in him, asleep within itself, untroubled by the passing winds of earth, silent and serene, under the light of its own eternal heaven. He wished for nothing more but the loss of strength to wish.

"Thus for ever," he murmured softly. "For ever and ever."

"Ce serait long," she said, opening her eyes, and smiling down upon him. She brought her rocking-chair to the ground with a sudden swoop. "My preux chevalier, you are still sentimental. In fact, I think you grow worse. It is good to give way to one's sentiment, and I also am fond of doing so. But my sentiment is always practical, and I think, do you know, I should like another kiss—and some coffee."

"You shall have neither," he said pettishly, "because you ask for both."

"Ciel," she said with mock affright, "I don't think I can do without the coffee! Avow, Arnout, that I have a right to tease you, after what you told me last night."

"What did I tell you last night? The same thing, as far as I can remember, that I have been telling you for the last fortnight, at least. If you are willing to hear again, sweetest, be sure that I am not tired of telling. But the musician, when he is in love with his own music——"

She laid her hand laughingly on his lips.

"It is not as bad as that," she said, "you do yourself injustice. There is nothing so fearful in all creation as the musician who is in love with his own music. I have met him in Paris, once or twice. I think I would rather have the cholera than meet him again. There, at least, the pain is short and sharp, and if it doesn't go over, you die."

"A human being can stand a good deal of pain without dying," he said.

"Don't talk ungratefully of pain," she answered impatiently. "You have none at this moment. And the weather is beautiful."

"I am happy," he said. "I would undo nothing, alter nothing. But do you not think it is pain to have lost the one thing one revered on earth? To look back upon the whole dream of one's youth, and to see 'murder' written across it?"

"Murder," she answered lightly—but her cheek flushed with emotion. "Nonsense! a little vivacity, that is all. You wrong the good lady, who did what she did for your sake, in any case. Don't let's talk of dismal subjects. Shall I tell you what you said last night?"

"Yes."

"Scene: a miserable tavern-lodging in the middle of the night. A lady, on a horsehair couch, in a muddled mass of wrappings, by the light of a common candle. A young gentleman standing in the middle of the uncarpeted floor. Says the lady, 'And now, my chevalier, are you going to stay or leave me?' Says the gentleman, 'Leave you.' And nearly a fortnight later he tells me that he meant it."

"Yes," said Arnout. "I meant it. What would you have? I did not know my own happiness."

"And now—a fortnight afterwards—you expect me to listen to these ravings without a smile?"

"A fortnight!" he cried vehemently. "It is a century! It is a history! A world! A new existence! A new creation! What do you talk with your little woman's intelligence of these minutiae of time. There lies a whole death and resurrection between the then and the now. What else could the old Arnout say but no? What else could he do but go out into the loneliness—the absolute loneliness—and kill himself! You reclaimed him. We killed him

together. Do not, I beg of you, talk of the past, which was hell; nor of the future, which may be purgatory; but of the present, which we know to be heaven. In that moment when I lost my belief in Aunt Suzanna, my whole existence died within me. I must wake to nothing, which is madness, or to love, which is you. Do you, then, reproach me for having passed through the river and lived?"

He had started to his feet. He was violently excited. Not so much, surely, by her words as by his own thoughts.

"Cher ami," she said, "I reproach you with nothing, save with thinking I could reproach you with ought. You wrong both me and yourself by the thought. We are insipid, like all lovers, and we can think of no better pastime than making each other uncomfortable. We are content with each other. Why not admit it and be happy? I am more than satisfied it should be so."

"I adore you," he said, and he sank down once more by her side.

"I wish that you would get me 'Jackanapes'," she said presently. "I cannot bear to be so long without him. And perhaps you could find Lucille and ask for the letters and that cup of coffee I hinted at just now."

"Jackanapes" was an exquisite little grey monkey which Arnout had found in the town two days ago

and bought of an itinerant beggar-boy. He had carried it home to Madame de Mongelas, and she had been delightfully delighted with it, so much so that the monkey was an especial source of pleasure to the giver. It was graceful of her to revert to him at this moment, as, in fact, all things were graceful, and tasteful, in this seductive woman, who twisted men's hearts round her fingers, and threw them off again.

Arnout, who had been sinking back into his delicious rapture, opened his eyes at the sound of her voice, and got up and shook himself. Then he walked off leisurely in the direction of the house.

They were staying in this great, well-nigh deserted hotel on the Lago Maggiore. The house would have been shut up on the first of July but for them, and Madame de Mongelas had persuaded the hotel-keeper to keep it open. They had come here almost immediately from Cologne, and they had now been about a fortnight together; Madame de Mongelas frankly admitted that, under the circumstances, she preferred a secluded spot, and a deserted hotel. She was on intimate terms with her so-called brother, such intimate terms that the hotel they inhabited might well be a quiet one. "It was touching," said the Swiss chambermaid with a wink, "to see such affection."

"Nothing unusual," replied Lucille, Madame's new personal attendant, "if you remembered that madame and monsieur had not seen each other for many years before the last week or two."

The vicomtesse had considered it expedient to acknowledge to Lucille a secret which she could not succeed in keeping from her. And Lucille fortunately had one of those impenetrable faces which are hereditary among ladies'-maids.

Madame de Mongelas lay watching Arnout's departing figure, a smile upon her lips—you could not have told, because of her drooping eyelids, whether it was a smile of amusement or of affection. She fanned herself listlessly with a long-handled fan of scarlet feathers. It was not that she disliked the heat, for it was she who had chosen this land of burning skies and blazing slopes.

"I am thirsty of warmth," she had said to Arnout. "Your country, with its cold colours and cold dispositions, has chilled me to the bones. Let us get away from the grey mists; you are all grey mist in Holland, and your hearts are benumbed in the fog. I must see a land once more where the sunshine strikes like a blow on the faces and the souls of the people, where eyes can glitter and cheeks can blush with passion, where the blood flows hot and the skies are blue, where the horses prance and the dogs bite

—a land where men kill for insult and women for love. And all that is missing in Holland. I do not say it is desirable, but it does not exist. You have nothing but virtues, but they are as near to vices as virtues possibly can be; and your vices, if you have them, are only those respectable vices that walk and stab in the dark. Yours is an amiable country, but you must not live in it if you possess what we call a ‘temperament.’ You must not love wrong too much, and you must not love right too much, and you must not do anything too much, except perhaps, accumulate money, and that you can never do too much. Above all, you must not feel too much. Faugh! I would rather be a cow, and ruminate. The cows, and the fish, and the frogs are the only creatures that live their lives amid your plains and platitudes as God intended them to live them. I must go out—out into a wider country, among freer hearts. I am thirsting, as I tell you, for heat and sunlight and passion. I am thirsting for the motion, and emotion, of life.”

“I should think,” Arnout had said quietly, “that you, at any rate, had no cause to complain of the want of murderous instincts among Dutchwomen.”

“Tiens, that is true. Do you know, I had completely forgotten that unpleasant little incident! After all, things are better in Holland than I thought. But, on the whole, one cannot help carrying away the

impression that the sentiments flow as sluggishly as the water."

So they had run through the St. Gothard and settled down at one of the first resting-places on the other side of the Alps, a lovely spot—in that favoured region you have not far to go for lovely spots. And they lay basking in the sunshine—soul and body—to their hearts' content, burning and shrivelling up in the stifling glare, at peace with their passions and at war with themselves.

"Better and better," said Madame de Mongelas to herself, as she lay there toying with her fan. "If we stay together much longer, I shall find it hard to part."

Arnout came back with the monkey, and the coffee, and the letters, and the maid. The maid had refused to carry the monkey, of which she was terribly afraid; and Jackanapes, on his part, preferred nothing on earth to the company of the man who had rescued him from unlimited stripes and promoted him to unlimited sweets. He even approved of that man's caresses beyond those of his lawful mistress, because the latter's kisses, as might have been expected of her character, were often interrupted by slaps. She liked her monkeys, when they pleased her. But, then, on the other hand, they pleased her easily when she liked them.

"Give me my letters," she said, holding out her hand; "and, Jacko, if you want your coffee, you must sit very quiet, till I have read them. You can go, Lucille. Monsieur will give me what I want."

Jacko's "coffee" was a lump of sugar, dipped in that invigorating beverage. It remains a mystery whether he took it on account of the mixture, or in spite of it. He cared for it enough, at any rate, to understand that he must sit still to obtain it. He cowered against Madame de Mongelas's white wrapper, and hid in its folds, looking out with puckered-up face and agitated eyebrows. His little black features and bright eyes were never still for a moment as he sat mumbling his skinny fingers in silent reproach for their emptiness. He blinked in the sunlight, and then he scratched his head. What was the use of having coffee and lumps of sugar brought out unless he were allowed to partake of them? He peeped up inquiringly a score of times, with the same little eager movement, at the viscountess reading her letters with concentrated face. Then a troubled expression came over him; he shot rapid glances at Arnout, who was pelting him—and his mistress—with yellow roses, and he ducked back again among the soft folds of the muslin, where he curled himself up with one hand over his pale pink nose. Life was a strange thing to Jacko, a medley of mad desire and brief fruition. For ten minutes he was crazy after a lump

of sugar, and, lo! it melted in his mouth. But, then, you know, he was only a monkey. We are men, dear Arnout Oostrum, intelligent, immortal men, and we manage these things much better.

Madame de Mongelas smiled over a sentence in her letter, and then the corners of her mouth broke down completely, and she laughed outright—a hearty, natural laugh that evidently rippled forth from a genuine source of amusement.

As she let the paper fall into her lap, Arnout saw that the writing was his aunt's. He turned very pale.

“La bonne tante s’use!” said the vicomtesse, still laughing; “you see that the letter is from her!”

“The superscription was not,” said Arnout.

“No, it has been sent on from Cologne, and there they put a second envelope round it. I asked the hotel-keeper to do so, if he got any letters from Holland.”

“You thought I would open them!” cried Arnout aflame.

“No, mon cher, not that, perhaps, exactly. Still, one cannot know what may happen. Temptations may arise—we are but mortal. The world is very wicked. It should have waited to give up sealing-wax and signets till the reign of Utopia was officially announced.”

“I cannot understand,” cried Arnout hotly, “how

you can feel any sort of tenderness for a man whom you think capable of opening your letters! For me, I could not love, if I did not honour——”

“Yes, you could, *mon cher*,” she interrupted. “Do not flatter yourself you are so exacting. But we women have other ideas on these matters than men, and you—you men—you do not love a woman for her virtues but for her face!”

A genuine scorn, a genuine depth of feeling rang out in her voice, addressed, not to him, but to his sex, and aroused who knows by what sad memories of illusions dead. She struck down his indignant protest.

“Let us not talk of the subject,” she said. “Do you not want to know what kind messages are sent you—through me—by your aunt?” And again, as her thoughts reverted to the letter, she glided over her scorn and her sad memories into a sonorous laugh.

“Tell me, if you wish to,” said Arnout moodily. “I do not care. My aunt is dead to me, as I told you before.” And he threw a last rose with such violence at Jacko, that the latter sat up, with deeply reproachful glances, and began plaintively rubbing his irritated nose.

“Leave Jacko alone, Arnout. Dead aunts are no good unless we inherit their property. I suppose,

however, there is not much to be expected in that way from Miss Varelkamp."

Arnout winced.

"In the mean time, I can assure you that she is very much alive. And she has just done me the honour of making me an offer of marriage, the first, by-the-bye, that I ever received in my life." Again she laughed merrily. Arnout stood staring at her in amazement.

"Why do you stare so? You are not complimentary. Or do you mean that I was asked in marriage before? Monsieur le Vicomte transmitted his demand to my father, and my father decided that it should be: yes. We manage these things better in France, you know. And my father had as much notion of love as a China shepherdess."

"May I read my aunt's letter?" said Arnout, recovering himself somewhat.

"I will read it to you; you might not like to see some of the mistakes in French the dear old lady makes." She took up the paper.

"MADAME,

"I have done you evil. It would be in vain for me not to confess it. God alone can fathom the evil you have done to me. And therefore I would ask you: let us repair, as far as is in our power, the evil we have done to each other. You have taken

my boy from me; take him then, retain him. But marry him, love him, be a faithful wife to him, and remove the stain from his name, and from his heart. I surrender him to you; I shall not trouble your repose again. He has not much money, but he has a little. He must learn to earn a little more, and then he will have enough to live frugally. Let me know that you accept my proposal, and my notary will write to him about the money. Until then I await your answer.

SUZANNA VARELKAMP.

"P.S.—Miss van Donselaar is well, and content it should be so."

The Frenchwoman laid the letter down, without reading out the postscript. "It is the intensest tenderness," she said musingly, "of a heart by nature harsh. But the tenderness all goes to you, mon cher. She might have apologised for attempting to poison me."

"Give me the letter," said Arnout.

"Why?" she asked. "Nonsense. Your aunt is dead. You can't get letters from dead aunts, so you see she wrote to me."

"Perhaps it is I who am dead," he answered fiercely, "but I still take a spasmodic interest in what occurs on earth. I wish you would give me the letter, Dorine."

He very rarely called her by her name—he had done so half a dozen times, at most. Dropping the

"madame" on that evening when he had linked his life to hers, he had taken up nothing to supply its place. "You must call me 'Dorine,' she had said to him on the succeeding morning, "my name is Dorine."

He had trembled to hear her, as a man trembles who is torn from his sleep in the middle of a dream. "Dorine!" Why that name of all others? It sounded so much like Dorothy. He would never say "Dorothy" again.

"But I have told you the contents. It is very touching and very droll. It is supremely droll, when one comes to think of it, that she should suggest my becoming a faithful wife." Once more she allowed her eyes to wander away from him, into regions of untraceable thought.

He bent forward to reach for the paper, but she drew it towards her. There remained that postscript, which it was not necessary for him to see.

"Eh bien?" she said, as she stretched out her hand for the coffee-tray, and, according her attention at length to Jacko's uninterrupted squeaks and tweaks, dipped the largest lump of sugar she could find into her cup. "Eh bien, monsieur?"

"What?" said he.

"What? Oh, but you are insupportable! And your rudeness is phenomenal. One does not say, 'What?' but, 'Plaît-il?' Have you nothing to say,

then, about this offer of marriage? It is you who are offered—as a lamb on the altar—and to me! And instead of confounding yourself in compliments and expressions of rapture, you merely say: ‘What?’ Quoi! Quoi! C’est du Hollandais, je suppose. La langue des canards. Ah, merci. I have not the slightest desire to become Madame Arnout Oostrum, Mefrouw Arnout Oostrum, 11, Canal de la Grenouillère.”

“Give me the letter,” said Arnout.

“Mon cher, you are no better than Jacko with his lump of sugar. And, at least, the lump of sugar is sweet, while the letter is extremely aigre-doux. I don’t think Jacko would care to have it. Would you, Jacko? Tiens, la voici!”

But the monkey thought differently. He liked the crackling sound the paper made. And he snatched at it, and darted off with a bound, up into the roses along a pillar of the portico, his slender grey tail scattering the rose-leaves as he went.

“Come down,” said Arnout, taking a lump of sugar from the saucer. He effected the exchange with a moment’s negotiation, for Jacko had no clear conception of the restrictions of barter, and preferred the simple arithmetic that one and one make two.

Arnout put the letter in his pocket without looking at it. It was a little incident, but it drove Madame de Mongelas into a very bad temper. She

did not really mind much whether he saw the document or what he did with it; only she liked to have her own way in little things, as well as in big.

"You can answer it for me," she said spitefully, "and you can say that I decline with thanks. Had you left it to me to reply, I should have written as follows:" and she repeated, considerably altering them, the well-known lines of the French poet—

"Suzanna, nay, farewell, I neither ask from thee
Of honour such excess, nor such indignity."

"What next?" said Arnout.

"What next?" she held out both her hands. "Another quotation: 'Cinna, let us be friends. The offer comes from me.'"

Arnout bent forward and raised the tips of her fingers to his lips.

"You are cruel," he said, "for you know your power."

"That is hard lines on me," she answered, "just after you have had your own way. But, come, I will no longer make fun of you. I will give you my third and last quotation; that exhausts my whole little classical store. I have only these three: 'Who runs to capture wit, brings back stupidity.' I am afraid that is the truest bit in all French literature, and I ought to take it to heart. My knowledge of the old periwigs is not extensive, however, as you see. I read the moderns, and so ought you to,

Arnout. Your knowledge of nineteenth-century writers is not what it might be. It is all very well to say that Musset is your favourite poet. I have nothing against Musset—he has been my friend for a dozen years—but he is not everybody. If you don't choose to read Jean Richepin or Guy de Maupassant, so be it. But you can't claim to be an educated man, and not know Coppée and Daudet. You must go down to the library on the Piazza presently, and see whether you can't find 'Le Nabab' or 'Fromont Jeune.' It is lamentable to think how your education has been neglected."

"Hum," said Arnout. "It's blazing hot. I don't know about going down to the Piazza."

"Now that is just what I like," she said lazily, stretching out her lithe limbs under their thin covering. "The sun can never be too hot for me. I wish it were always at fever-point."

"And you asleep under it," he answered. "You forget that you have no reason to exert yourself."

"No," she said, "nor you. By-the-bye, Arnout, I had no idea you had any money—be it ever so little—as your aunt says."

"Nor had I," he answered, colouring. "I never heard of it."

"Never mind," she continued indifferently. "It will do perhaps, some day, to fall back upon when all our present resources are gone. There is that

man again up at his window, on the third story. I wish he would go away. I feel sure he has followed us from Cologne. Some spy of your aunt's, I suppose."

"I should hardly think that," replied Arnout. "And I did not see him at the Cologne station, as you say."

"If he is a spy, you must thrash him, and pitch him into the lake. I wish, Arnout, you would thrash somebody."

"Why?" asked Arnout in surprise.

"It would look so manly, and I like a man to be strong. You have a splendid physique, Arnout. What a figure! What a chest! You ought to do something with them except merely look handsome and pass your hand through your hair. I am glad you keep it short, with just that little wave in it. I detest curls. And I detest dark men. You are as fair as a young Northern god. There, I am sure I have made amende honorable. And I have earned a couple of books from the library. Bring me—if you can get it—'Dernier Amour.'"

He slipped away from the balustrade against which he had been leaning, and walked towards the garden steps, his tall shadow black as ink upon the marble in the dazzle of that cloudless sky.

"Come here, Jackanapes," said Madame de Mongelas, "and let yourself be punished for taking

your master's part. You are a traitor, and if you were all tail, and no legs, I should call you a serpent that I had nurtured at my breast."

But Jackanapes preferred his safe perch among the roses.

"I am bullied by every one," she said to herself with a mock grimace and a yawn. "By the maid, and the monkey, and the young man. Juffrouw Varelkamp would be surprised, if she knew how the young man bullies me. He has something in him to be almost afraid of, a limit, somewhere, to his good temper. He is very amiable and sweet-natured and courteous—and houp-là, l'ouragan! He is not so easy to manage as I imagined; not half so easy as a little French boulevardier. But then, I prefer the rawer material, though, as for being his wife—no, I don't think I should do for his wife. What is your opinion, Monsieur le Vicomte?"

She laughed again to herself at the idea of Miss Suzanna's matchmaking. It seemed to afford her a great deal of quiet amusement. And then she lured down Jacko with another bit of sugar, and slapped him for his disobedience when he ventured to descend.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGER FROM HOME.

As he passed down the broad steps which led to the flower-garden, Arnout found himself confronted by the stranger who had aroused Madame de Mongelas's suspicions. The man was not a personage, one would have thought, to attract much attention or excite much alarm; he looked a fairly harmless old gentleman of independent means and considerable leisure, whose age you would have put down at sixty-five or perhaps sixty-seven, and whose country, whatever his fatherland may have been, was now probably America. He was tall and well-, if somewhat easily, dressed, while his short hair and long whiskers, both of a whitening grey, were evidently carefully kept. He looked keenly at Arnout—out of watery eyes—as that young Hollander descended towards him, and, nodding his head without removing his hands from his pockets, he remarked, as soon as they were close to each other, that it was a very warm day.

“Undoubtedly,” said Arnout, and continued his

way. But the stranger had no intention of letting him escape with such ease. He walked on at his side, along the little platform on which he had met him, and down the rest of the steps and across the garden. Arnout could not but go slowly; in that furnace of red-handed summer it would have been foolishness to hurry. And the grey-haired old gentleman, throwing out his long legs with lazy indifference, began a conversation about the place, and the scenery, and the climate, and the table d'hôte, all the tiresome small talk which, in travelling, takes the place of an introduction.

It was not till they had sauntered into the town that the stranger adverted to Madame de Mongelas.

"You are fortunate," he said politely, "in not being here alone. It is a quiet spot. I hear that the lady with you is your sister, is she not? A very beautiful woman, if you will excuse my taking the liberty of saying so."

Arnout bowed stiffly. He did not excuse any liberty at all.

"And I come from a land where beautiful women are far from uncommon. I am an American, and my name is Doyer, a Dutch name, in fact. I must tell you that I was born in Holland, though I left the country when very young. So you see I am almost a compatriot of yours, only I have no more friends

or relations on this side the Atlantic. Nor many on that."

All this was very unpleasant to Arnout. He in no wise desired to make any acquaintances, least of all among compatriots or semi-compatriots. And as he picked his way through the narrow streets, under canopies of drying maize and onions, between the tall, crooked houses, with a narrow slit of blue sky at the top, he bethought him how he could give the stranger the slip.

"And from what part of Holland, are you, if I may ask?" said Mr. Doyer.

"From Wyk," replied Arnout with evident constraint.

"Indeed. I am from Amsterdam. That is to say, I was born in that city. I have no members of my family living there now, as far as I know."

"Indeed," said Arnout, in his turn. He lifted his hat. "I am going in here," he said, as he stopped at the little bookseller's in the sunlit Piazza. "I wish you a very good day."

He walked into the dark shop, and he noticed that the stranger lingered for a few moments outside, pretending to look over the yellow-cover novels and queer old prints laid out under the gallery that runs round the square.

"Cool as a cucumber," said the old gentleman to himself. "Ah, well, I suppose most young fellows are

alike. I dare say I should have done much the same thing at his age. When you have got a good thing, he thinks, keep it dark."

Arnout, having purchased a new novel or two and watched the American out of sight, lounged back again into the Piazza and down towards the lake. He dragged himself indolently past the boats and over the golden shingle, and then he flung himself down under the shade of half a dozen straggling ilex trees, and took out of his pocket his Aunt Suzanna's letter. He had heard nothing of home and home-matters since his parting from Jakob in the cathedral. And no sign of intercourse had passed between him and Suzanna Varelkamp since that last word "murderess" spoken on the Saturday night, now nearly fourteen days ago. He looked down at the familiar handwriting, and angry thoughts swelled upwards in his heart. He could not think otherwise than angrily as yet of Suzanna. He strove rather not to think of her at all. Murder! It was true, as he had said, that she had written that word large over all his past. The woman whom he had loved and revered as the incarnation of stern duty and simple honesty—a murderess in will. He ascribed her attempt to the maddest, nay, the silliest jealousy, and he was wroth with her, not perhaps even so much because she had lifted her hand against a creature he worshipped with amorous infatuation, as

because she had destroyed all the love of his youth at a blow. Whom was he to believe? What was he to believe? Why could he not cherish her as he had ever done in the happy years gone by? It was cruel of her thus to cut away the ground from under his feet. Hanging in mid-air, he had clutched the hand held out to save him, and had fallen on the breast of Madame de Mongelas. Generous, forgiving, deeply injured woman! He felt the blame lie heavy on himself when he thought of what she had undergone. It was he who had brought her to the house, where hospitality had turned to hatred, and where even the life of a guest had not been safe from attack. The idea of this violated sanctuary was a horrible one to Arnout. All his chivalry had risen up in arms to defend the injured one. No sacrifice of his, he felt, could ever atone to Madame de Mongelas for the wrong that had been done her by him. He looked upon himself as a bearer and sharer of the crime. He could have gone down on his knees to her to implore her pardon. He did so in the transports of his tenderness and his shame. For he surrendered his young heart to her in that moment when all things forsook him, and where the rest and the happiness were gone, he found passion and riotous enjoyment and all the wild ecstasy of living in her kiss and in her smile. He rejoiced in her, in her beauty and her talents, and all the delightful fascina-

tion which played and glistened about her, and he asked himself breathlessly how so lovely and gifted a creature could care to waste her charms upon him. And he loved her then, more for his own sake, perhaps, than for hers, in his harmless boyish vanity and his frantic boyish sorrow, and in all the wild enthusiasm of a new-found paradise.

He looked down with half-closed eyes at the letter in his hand, and his dreamy interest was arrested by the postscript she had left unread.

"Miss van Donselaar is well, and content it should be so."

Perhaps it would have been better had Madame de Mongelas simply let him have the words. Now they came upon him with the extra meaning of her reticence. And they struck home; he could hardly have told you why. There was a simplicity in them which seemed to speak of a great renunciation. And another sentence came back upon his memory which often suddenly arose within him, in the midst of the most varied occupations.

"She loves you, and you have deserted her," it said. He was troubled and vexed, and uncertain what to think. He could not but help recognising the all-absorbing love for him which spoke out of his aunt's epistle. And then again he told himself that in making this strange proposal of marriage she was sacrificing him, as she would think, to her crotchety

ideas of right and wrong. And what business had she—the would-be assassin—with ideas of right and wrong? Of her allusions to the money which was his—or would be—he understood nothing. He had never heard of it. Could it be true that it existed? There lay the one great thorn among his roses—the rankling prick in his fair young flesh—in the ever-present thought that he had no money at his disposal, now that he wanted it, that it was Madame de Mongelas who settled the bills. It was one of the thoughts that, somehow, wake you in the middle of the night, and leave you red-hot and uncomfortable under the bedclothes. He hated it, and it clung to him. He reckoned out to himself more or less, what their daily expenses must be, and he told himself, with boyish confidence, that Madame de Mongelas's expenditure was only a temporary advance, and that he would find means to repay her. His aunt's suggestion, therefore, was far from unpleasing to him, and he strove to convince himself that the money was there. Perhaps, even, there was more than she admitted. Why should not the soul that could sink to murder pass through an intermediate stage of embezzlement? He would not answer his aunt's letter—how could he? but he would write to the notary and demand explanations. If there was money, why had there not been a guardian?—Hum, a guardian. There, for a moment, his thoughts

were arrested. For guardians, he remembered, had a habit of making things unpleasant for young minors who go travelling without leave.

In the evening, after their late dinner, when the sunlight was slowly passing from golden flame into that quiet glow, as of dying embers, which causes us to steal forth from the newly opened windows in vain hope of a breeze—in the evening then, amid the sweet scents and the stillness, ere the noises of a summer night had begun, Arnout, strolling listlessly on the terrace, met the stranger again. Madame de Mongelas watched their meeting from her balcony, where she sat among white shawls and white roses, with a great Japanese paper umbrella in a crimson flare over her head. And Jacko watched them, cracking almonds on the broad balustrade by his mistress's side, supremely happy in a narrow silver bracelet which the viscountess had dropped round his neck. He considered all strangers impertinences, unless they brought him sweets.

"Come out for a smoke after dinner?" questioned Mr. Doyer. "The best thing a sensible man can do. Would you care to try one of my cigars? I believe I can venture to recommend them. I bought them at Havannah myself."

Now Arnout, like every genuine Dutchman, loved a good cigar more than anything else on this wide,

wicked old earth. More than home or land or kindred, or the wife of your bosom, if you've got one, or your favourite make of boots, that look nice, and *yet* don't hurt you, or any other cherished treasure that is very dear and sweet. We all know the story of my friend van X——, whose wife at last rebelled against sitting in perpetual fumes and being smoked alive, like a piece of dead pig.

"I bargained for a place at your fireside," she said, "but not for a place up your chimney. You must choose between your cigar and me."

She lives with her parents now, and he allows her one half of her pin-money, while he has added-on the remaining half to the price of his after-dinner cigar.

Arnout, then, made friends with the best cigar he had ever smoked in his life.

They talked of many things, such as men talk of who have no interests in common, dropping gradually, however, from tittle-tattle into more engrossing topics, as the stranger began to speak of his travels and his adventures, which had been numerous, in various countries of the world. Evidently he had seen a good deal of life, and of unusual forms of life, the seamy side of the great struggle for existence. And he could talk well of what he had seen, perhaps with a little of too evident self-confidence, but that cannot be taken alto-

gether amiss in a man who has worked his own way up. He told Arnout of shooting-parties (where the ground-game was not always four-footed) in regions whose names made the young fellow long for a map, and then he drifted back to his own youth, and the fatherland of which he said he could no longer speak even the language, and he asked Arnout—casually—whether he had ever heard the name of Vinkebaan.

Arnout said he had not.

“A man of that name used to come and see my father,” the stranger continued, “I should like to know what has become of him. And then there was another whom I faintly remember, called Slinkert, a fellow with a great grog-blossom on the top of his nose. And there was young Donselaar, the coffee-merchant’s son. He was a little younger than I, and he used sometimes to come and play with me. It is all very vague, because, you see, I was quite a small boy when we left. But I should have liked to hear news of van Donselaar.”

Arnout lay with his arms crossed on the parapet, watching the blue rings from his cigar on the heavy air.

“You don’t happen to have ever come across the name?” said the stranger, casting another of those keen glances at him out of his pale eyes.

“There is a Mynheer van Donselaar in Wyk,”

answered Arnout. "What a splendid cigar you have given me."

"You are welcome to as many more as you care to smoke. No offence; I am an old man, and you are a young one. I wonder whether your Mynheer van Donselaar could by any possibility be mine. What is his occupation?"

"He used to have a coffee-broker's office in Amsterdam. He has retired now, and his sons manage it—that is to say—he has kept the superintendence. Do you know what flower that is, that orange one, something like a lily?"

"Clivia, the name is. A coffee-broker! It must be the same. And has he a wife and children?"

"His wife is dead, but he has three children—two sons and a daughter."

"And it is not true, as I once heard in America, that he had married a Miss Varelkamp?"

Arnout began to dislike the stranger exceedingly. The man knew far too much about home matters.

"No," he said curtly. "Miss Varelkamp is my aunt. She is unmarried. She has only one other sister living, and her name is Barsselius."

"Indeed! Your aunt! How very extraordinary. Then your mother, I suppose, was a Miss Varelkamp?"

"Yes," said Arnout, "evidently. I don't remember her. She died when I was five years old."

"Ah," said the American musingly. "She died when you were five years old. And since then, I presume, you have lived with your aunt, Miss Varelkamp?"

"I never said so," cried Arnout, turning upon him. "Who are you, sir? You seem to know a good deal of the country you left so long ago. And your accent isn't that of an American. What is your business with Miss Varelkamp or with me?"

"None," said the stranger politely. "No business, and, as far as you are concerned, only pleasure. Excuse me, I was merely inferring, perhaps somewhat hastily. I intended nothing approaching offence, I assure you my interest in Holland is of the remotest. Let us talk of something else."

"I think I must go back to madame," answered Arnout stiffly. "I am much obliged to you for your cigar—and good night." He lifted his hat, and moved off in the direction of the balcony.

"Arnout," cried out Madame de Mongelas, leaning over the side, "I wrote the most delicious of letters to la Tante Suze, but I gave it to Jacko to read, and he has torn it up. So you must come and help me to write another, unless we have changed our minds. Shall it be 'Yes'?"

She hung over the balcony, laughing, in a mass of sinking sunlight that covered her white figure and her roses with a flood of reflected colour from the

crimson shade overhead. And she dropped her arm down the side with a movement of abandonment and appeal. "Shall it be 'Yes'?" she said.

But she did not wait for his answer. She started forward and, catching the delighted Jacko to her bosom in a passionate embrace, she burst into the coquettish refrain of a song that was popular several years ago—

"No, sir! no, sir! no, sir!—no!"

"Suze," said Doyer to himself as he walked away. He had caught the first few words of her speech. "Suzanna, of course. Gad, how the thing comes back to me. There's no fool like an old fool, by Jove."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISTAKES AND MISHAPS OF KAREL DONSELAAR.

"It is perfectly impossible," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "perfectly preposterous. It appears to me, woman, that your head has become confused by the exciting incidents you have witnessed, and that you now see a repetition of the scandal wherever you look. Such things are not unusual. I was reading only the other day of a similar case in the paper. Wait a moment, and I will see whether I can find it."

He got up and began a diligent search among a pile of old newspapers. Perhaps he was not sorry to hide his agitation.

"Do you mean, mynheer," queried Betje, even redder in the face than usual, "that I have fancied the whole thing to myself? Oh dear, no; I haven't that gift of imagination. I only wish I had, and I could earn more by writing the stories in the paper that they give so much money for than I can by being Miss Varelkamp's servant. Not that I object to my service. And not that I should like to make up stories, mynheer, however much I was paid for

them, which is wicked, and lies, and of the devil, who is the father of lies. No, I never made up a story since I was a little girl, and said that the baker was going to marry our neighbour's daughter, and my dear mother spanked me, and I bless her for it in her grave. No, you won't find me inventing anything, Mynheer van Donselaar, and I don't know, I'm sure, how people can manage to think of things they haven't seen. I've always trusted my eyes and ears, and, except what they've told me during the forty years of my earthly pilgrimage, I know nothing, nor I don't want to, thank Heaven."

Mynheer van Donselaar had not been listening. He turned away from his meaningless search for the newspaper and resumed his seat in the round arm-chair by his writing-table.

"Sit down, woman!" he said, speaking harshly in his agitation. "Sit down—What's yer Name!"

"I was christened Elisabeth Overdenboogaardsloot, mynheer," said Betje with much dignity, folding her red hands under her woollen shawl, "after my grandmother, who was a most God-fearing woman, and could read her Bible without spectacles at the age of eighty-nine."

Under ordinary circumstances, this information would have exceedingly interested Mynheer van Donselaar, for he had recently begun collecting facts which related to cases of longevity, and a curious

olla podrida such old gentlemen do get together when they once begin to cut scraps out of the newspapers and to interrogate workpeople in the streets.

But at the present moment he had other things to think of. He even forgot that he had ordered his head-gardener to come to him at nine o'clock precisely, and that it was already two minutes past.

"And you mean to tell me," he said impressively, "that you accuse my son of unseemly familiarity with a servant-girl of this village?"

There came a knock at the door as he was speaking. In answer to mynheer's impatient, "Come in," the gardener made his appearance.

"What is it?" said mynheer.

The man could hardly believe his ears. Never in all Mynheer van Donselaar's methodical life had such a question seemed possible.

"You ordered me to come, mynheer," he stammered.

"Go to the devil," cried the poor Paragon. "I mean, another time. Come again another time."

"How late, mynheer?" asked the man, alarmed, yet clinging to the one idea which ruled that orderly household. For when we educate our servants to be nuisances, nuisances they will undoubtedly become.

"To-morrow. We will talk of it to-morrow. Good night."

"Amen, yes, and so be it. The truth will out," said Betje, as soon as the gardener was gone.

"And now, your proofs?" said mynheer, trying to assume a magisterial air.

"Ask the girl, mynheer; she won't deny it. She's only too proud to tell it to any one that will hear."

"And her name?" He took out a note-book and neatly found the place and held a pencil ready. As if, poor man, there was any chance of his forgetting that name when once he heard it.

It would have been difficult for him, however, as it was fortunately unnecessary, to note down all the information which Betje vouchsafed him. She was eloquent by nature, and she had cultivated the gift. And she was moreover one of those persons whose religion mainly consists in glorying in the abasement of the human race in general and of their neighbours in particular. She was logical enough in her way. "The world is very wicked:" that was her philosophy. "Therefore the people I meet with are wicked:" these were her politics; and "I must pray for their improvement, while I do not believe in it," that was her religion. The only thing that was not perfectly plain to her was this, how her cronies, who shared her conceptions of universal depravity, could be stupid enough to find occasional fault with herself. She would sit for hours of a Sunday evening, lament-

ing with her friends from the village the fallen condition of mankind and the frowardness of the human heart; but she had not spoken for three years to a cousin who had ventured to tell her she was very self-willed.

She now rejoiced in the painful duty which she told herself she was constrained to perform. Never would she have spoken another word on the subject, if Karel van Donselaar had kept his word. He had not kept it; on the contrary, he had outrageously broken it, and neighbour's Cornélie was not unwilling it should be known that he had done so. In fact, it may well be questioned whether the triumphant stare with which she passed by Betje on Sunday morning, in a hat with curling white feathers and a couple of silver bracelets, was not preponderantly conducive to the virtuous maiden's visit at Steenevest. For Virtue can bear a good deal of personal disparagement and feel all the happier for its affliction, but Vice, rampant in a new bonnet and shawl, has always put it in a bad temper. It was so in the days of the singer of that wonderful seventy-third Psalm, and it is so to-day. And so the voice of duty called to Betje, and she obeyed.

"That is enough, I am sure," said Mynheer van Donselaar. "It only remains to be proved whether it is true. You will now, if you please, leave the matter in my hands. You say you came upon them

together unexpectedly some days ago. What did you do on that occasion, may I ask?"

She told him, leaving out the little incidents of the chastisement she had inflicted and the rix-dollar she had received.

"Arnout Oostrum," said Mynheer van Donselaar, interrupting her story with a sneer, "a very fit person, indeed, to advise my son on the matter. It is he, probably, the young profligate, who has led the poor boy astray."

"That, mynheer, I take leave to question," cried Betje, hugely proud of the phrase and the word. "And—no offence intended—but I don't think the cases are similar, though I would be the last person in Wyk to defend the wickedness of Arnout Oostrum."

She was viciously angry at her mistress's nephew, most of all, perhaps, on account of the sorrow he had brought over that mistress. She would find it impossible to forgive him; in fact she never has done so, but she was not going to have him abused—in her hearing—by anybody but herself.

"Very well," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "what pay do you expect for having spoken here, or for keeping a quiet tongue in your head elsewhere? We may as well settle that matter in this first and only interview."

Betje crossed her two hands on her chest.

"Pay!" she said, "but, mynheer! what other pay

can I expect than the reward of a conscience at rest? Not that my place is a profitable one in the sight of the world. Far from it. It's not one of those kitchens of the wealthy where the butter-pot is left open all day. And I lost my best Sunday shawl on that evening when I tried to rescue your son. But I don't mention it. And I labour for that which prophesieth not—profiteth not, I mean. No, I mean I do not labour for that which profiteth."

Mynheer van Donselaar looked in his purse for a gold-piece. He had not one—and yet he remembered having had it—there was only a note for twenty-five florins. That was too much. He wanted to get rid of the woman—the sooner the better—but he did not want to give her double the sum he had intended. So he got up, all dazed by the terrible revelation she had brought him—and stumbled across the room to unlock a strong box which stood on a side-table. Then he came back to her. "Go," he said, and she, nodding her head in what she imagined to be a curtsy, retired from the field of her labours, with a vague consciousness of having sown the seed. Only she found the golden harvest rather small.

Mynheer van Donselaar, left to himself, sat in his arm-chair, a prey to two conflicting impressions. The aberration of his eldest son was a heavy blow to him, heavier than it would have been to many a father; first, because he himself had always been so

highly respectable; and secondly, because he had been firmly convinced, with an opinionated parent's blissful confidence, that his children obeyed him in everything, and were growing up models of propriety like himself. But, looking at the delinquency entirely from the social, and not from the moral point of view, his chief sentiment was one of excessive irritation and injured vanity. "If Karel had been the jonker from the castle," he said to himself, "the thing would have been, perhaps, hardly agreeable, yet far from unusual, and, on the whole, rather smart, but it doesn't answer in a man of business. No, no; it doesn't answer. And we must put a stop to it at once." And at the same time there came creeping upon his anxiety about his son the uncertainty what could have become of that ten-florin piece which he had had in the morning. They mixed themselves up in his head, and he could not keep them apart. It need not be said that he was exact in money matters. Good heavens! He remembered as if it were yesterday that period of his life—it was in one of the first years while he was managing the business for his mother and sisters—when an error of $37\frac{1}{2}$ cents had remained inexplicably fixed in his balance. How it had tortured him through the sleepless nights, and kept him in a ferment of addition and subtraction through the restless days. He was sparing of his money in those

days when he had little, as in these when he had much; but he would have willingly sacrificed a hundred florins, if thereby he could have bought the clue to his mistake. Such an accident had never occurred again in all the years of his book-keeping—he would not have called it an accident, but a crime; nor had he ever lost a piece of money except that fifty Pfennig bit which had dropped past the bag during the collection in the church at Ems, and rolled into the hot-air grating, a loss he could never remember without regret. He wanted to know what had become of that gold-piece, and he wanted to know what must be done with his light-minded young son and heir.

He looked at the clock, and then at his watch; he always looked at both together, unconsciously, except when they differed. “Half-past nine,” he said, “Koos will be coming in presently. I shall see, when Koos comes in.” And then he began counting up his money, and fuming and fussing about that “golden Willem,” till he had almost forgotten Karel’s amorous entanglement.

Koos walked in before his father had come to a satisfactory conclusion, with his nightly report in his hand.

“Koos,” said mynheer, without looking up from his papers, “where is Karel?”

"In his own room, I presume, papa," answered Koos as usual.

"And what is he doing in his room?"

"He reads a great deal, I believe, papa."

"And what have you been doing?"

"Playing the violin, papa."

"Well, go up and tell Karel I want to speak to him."

Koos moved towards the door.

"Never mind about the coffee to-night," said Mynheer van Donselaar. "Oh, you might just tell me one thing. Are prices up or down?"

"Down, papa," said Koos, with his hand on the open door. "To 7.30. And Boon and Bruin have failed."

"You don't mean to say so!" cried mynheer, starting up. "Boon and Bruin failed! What next! Tell me all about it. Sit down, Koos. Tell me everything you know. It is most remarkable. I should have thought they were good for another six months at least."

"People were saying they would be good for thirty-five per cent., on 'Change," said Koos, as he came back to the writing-table.

"Not they," replied his father. "They will pay fifteen per cent., and be rich men again in a year or two. But give me the particulars first, and then you can go up and fetch Karel."

A few minutes later Koos, having told what he knew or conjectured, sought out Dorothy, and explained to her his dilemma. "The old gentleman is asking for Karel," he said, "and Karel is out in the woods and far away."

"Then you must just go down and tell father that he is not in the house," replied Dorothy with kindling eyes.

"But I don't like playing the sneak, Dolly," objected Koos.

"This is not playing the sneak. You have no choice but to go on lying to father or to tell the simple truth. I myself have often been in doubt, of late, whether I should not open father's eyes to Karel's goings on—unasked."

"Am I my brother's keeper?" said Koos lightly—as young men do say when they want to save their brothers from perdition and feel their powerlessness to do so.

"You have no choice," said Dorothy severely, "and I am glad you have none. Go down and answer papa's question; and leave the rest to come right as it can. I don't know, and I hardly wish to know, why Karel runs out every evening, but he can't be after much good. I have tried to speak to him about it once or twice, but you can't get much response out of Karel."

"There is one thing I don't quite understand,"

began Koos hesitatingly—"I wouldn't say anything to hurt you for the world, you know, Dolly—only I can't make out how you judge Arnout Oostrum so differently. You—you seem to have such a fund of indulgence for Arnout Oostrum; and, after all, Karel doesn't seem to be half as bad as *him*."

Dorothy felt herself considerably flustered by this direct inquiry. She had flattered herself that she was cruelly severe in her judgment of Arnout, and that she had brought to light this severity in her brief conversations on the subject with Koos. She was amazed to discover that Koos had received such a different impression, and she inwardly resolved to be far sterner with her own heart in future.

"I don't know," she said awkwardly. "I was not aware I was too lenient about Oostrum. Still, I think I have this excuse that the cases are probably very different. I believe, if we could know the particulars, we should find that Arnout Oostrum was more sinned against than sinning."

Koos stood for a moment looking at her, desirous, undecided, fluctuating between yes and no. Then he came back to her and put his arm around her neck, in the silence and the darkness. And she took his hand in hers and pressed it, and so, without a word and without a tear, she opened her heart to him and accepted the solace he was yearning to bestow.

"You must hear my new sonata," he said presently, gently disengaging himself. "I have been practising that difficult bit all the evening, as you advised me, and I think I have got it nearly perfect now. I wish it were not so hard to play well. Only the wicked things seem easy."

He tramped downstairs unwillingly to his father, and opened the study door.

"Ten and two are twelve, and seven nineteen," murmured Mynheer van Donselaar. "Well?"

"Karel is not in the house, papa."

"Then why did you say he was, Koos?"

Koos shrugged his shoulders. "I thought he probably would be," he said.

"No, you did not. You knew that, of late, he has constantly been out at night. You lied to me as you have repeatedly done on the matter. I don't think, Koos, that I have ever told a lie since I was a boy at school. But my children, it appears, think differently of these matters."

"Dorothy doesn't tell lies," interposed Koos hotly.

"I did not say that she did. I was alluding to my sons. You do. It all comes of your so-called artistic tastes. Every artist is a liar—as he must be, for art is lies—but every liar is by no means an artist. It takes a good deal to become a thoroughly artistic liar, Koos. I don't think I ever met more

than one in all my life, and that was your uncle. You might perhaps emulate his example in time, if you think it is worth the trouble."

"Don't speak to me like that, papa," said Koos tremulously. "I don't lie to you as a rule. Only I thought I ought to try and shield Karel."

"I shall speak to you as I choose, sir," said his father pompously. "My children are a source of great sorrow to me, and I fear I have treated them with too great indulgence. But there will be no more of this, so I warn you. Henceforward I shall never trust you again."

"But, papa——"

"Silence! Leave the room. And your blood be upon your own head. It is nearly supper-time. Go and see if Dorothea is downstairs." And he returned to the search among his accounts for the missing money.

He rose from it, unsatisfied, as soon as the clock struck ten, and went in to have supper with his children. Karel did not turn up, an unusual circumstance, for, as a rule, he managed to be back in his place at the table. Only on one or two occasions had it been necessary for Koos to find an excuse for him.

After supper—*and* evening prayers—Mynheer van Donselaar wished his children good night, and went round to lock up the house as usual, Piet, the

man-servant, being in attendance, also, as usual, with a candle and the keys. And it was then that Mynheer van Donselaar extracted from Piet the confession that the servant had been bribed by his young master to sit up occasionally and let him in. He dismissed the man on the spot, with a six-week's notice, instead of the customary three months (for so long do Dutch mistresses have to endure their departing domestics), and then he put out all the lights and prepared to sit up in the dark.

He occupied himself with repeating his calculations, waiting alone in a little cloak-room off the hall, till the clocks with which the house abounded had all rung out through the darkness the hour of eleven. He noticed with much displeasure that a couple of minutes elapsed between the striking of this clock and that, and that only two struck exactly in unison. "The irregular," he said to himself with a sigh, "is the only rule. Happy the fool who can't think or act straight."

A few moments after the last tone had died away, he heard stealthy steps coming up the avenue, and then a low whistle. He went to a little side door and opened it, standing well back in its shadow. The night was very dark, yet he could distinguish the figure of his eldest son, as the young man slipped into the passage.

"Here, Piet," whispered Karel, holding out his

hand without looking round, "here is what I promised you."

His father quietly took the proffered coin, and threw-to the door, whilst Karel hurried upstairs. Then Mynheer van Donselaar went back to his study, lighted a candle, and looked down on the piece of money his son had just given him.

He recognised it at once. It had had a little green spot on it which he had casually noticed, and there the little green spot was still. A sound broke from him which was very like a groan of pain, and then he snuffed out the candle carefully, and crept up to his room in the dark.

CHAPTER VII.

"YOU BORE US, PAPA."

BREAKFAST as usual. The uncomfortable old Dutch breakfast. Bread and cheese for the men. Bread and honey-cake for the women. An egg for the invalid. Family prayers first at eight o'clock, Mynheer van Donselaar reading, with a steady voice, the story of the Prodigal Son, and a lengthy disquisition on it out of a Dutch "Day by Day," then the meal, solemn and silent—but that was nothing new at Steenevest—broken at times by a remark from Karel, which the others answered in monosyllables. A general feeling of thunder in the air.

"Karel," began Mynheer van Donselaar, as his son pushed away his cup and rose from the table, "I have to return a sum of money to you, which you erroneously bestowed upon me yesterday evening. Or was it an act of restitution, and did you remember that the money was rightfully mine?" He flung the gold-piece on the table as he spoke.

Karel allowed himself, for a moment, to be utterly perturbed. Then he recovered his presence of mind, and said as calmly as he could—

"Yes, papa, it is true that I came home late last night. I had been to young Langhodt and stayed to supper. I had no idea you would sit up, of course. And I had promised Piet a tip."

"Tell me first," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "how you extracted yonder piece of money from my purse. I suppose you did it while I was asleep on the sofa after dinner. After that, you can tell me what your intentions are with regard to that girl, Cornélie."

"I see," said Karel, thrusting both his hands deep down in his pockets, and making himself as tall as he could. "It's all up. Of course I thought it would be some day. Very well, papa, now you know it, what next? Life can't easily be more hateful anywhere else than in this house, and any change would be an improvement, I should say."

"You will have the change, Karel," said Mynheer van Donselaar quietly.

"I am glad of it, papa.—What do you mean, you two," he continued, turning fiercely on his brother and sister, "by standing grinning there? Get out, can't you, and leave papa and me to settle this little business between us?"

Dorothy would have spoken, but her father also waved her away. The pair left the dining-room with heavy hearts.

"Karel," said Mynheer van Donselaar, as the

door closed upon them, "you are my eldest son. I have done everything for you—both for your education and your entertainment—that an enlightened parental affection can effect. You have not been spoilt, I admit it, but, far better, you have been kindly nurtured. You have rewarded all my fostering care by dissolute conduct, and—far worse—by theft. You, a merchant, and a merchant's son, have stooped to theft. I tremble to think what future perhaps awaits you; but the crimes which you may possibly commit you shall not commit in this country. You will leave this house with me within six hours, and you will not return to it. We shall procure an outfit together in Amsterdam, and you will sail for Java by the next boat that goes out."

"And what am I to do in Java?" asked Karel.

"I will give you letters to my correspondents out there. You will be put to work on a coffee-plantation in the interior. And your future will depend upon yourself."

"Is that all?" asked Karel politely.

"Yes, that is all, for the present. Oh, Karel, Karel, you are worse than the young man we read about this morning. For, at least, his father had given him the money he wasted on riotous living. Oh, my boy, my boy, if you could but see the error of your ways, how very quickly you would depart from them!"

"My father never gave me any money to waste," said Karel quickly. "And now, papa, listen to me for a moment. You have favoured me with your view; may I trouble you with mine? Ever since I can remember, I have been bored to death in this house with a thousand little worries and fusses that are of no good to any one, not even to you. I don't say that you have treated me cruelly, though you have never showed me any kindness worth mentioning; I suppose you are fond of me—and of the others—after your manner, but it is a manner, in any case, which we children don't understand. We are thoroughly uncomfortable, and, in one word, you bore us. A weight is taken off our hearts whenever you leave the room. Under these circumstances, I have looked for amusement elsewhere. I have gone a little wild, undoubtedly; but the blame—if there be much blame—is not mine. During all these years it has been the one enjoyment I have had. It was not altogether an innocent one. But will you oblige me by remembering, papa, that I told you it was the only enjoyment I had ever had. And now I am ready to go to Java till you want me back again."

"That will not be soon," said Mynheer van Donselaar, livid with wrath.

"You know, papa, that I never lay wagers; but I should almost feel inclined to offer you one that you will want me back for the business some day. For,

whatever my faults have been, you must admit that I was good for the business. Was I not good for the business, papa?"

"Yes," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "but a thief." And he walked out of the room.

"A thief!" said Karel to himself. "C'est trop fort. He is really insupportable, and I shall be glad to get away from him. He owes me a good deal more than those beggarly ten florins I appropriated yesterday. Here have I been making money for him for the last three years without even getting a decent salary. The money, and much more of it, is mine by right. We shall see how he manages on Koos's fiddling. I shan't much mind getting a sight of the world, and they say life is jolly enough on some of those big coffee-plantations."

Nobody considered it worth his while to worry about Cornélie.

"Papa," said Dorothy at her father's study door, "papa, you must let me in! I want to speak to you."

No answer.

"Let me in, papa! I have something of importance to say."

Still no answer,

It was then that Dorothy went round by the open French window and walked into the room.

Never had such boldness been heard of in the annals of Steenevest. The study door, even unlocked, was an almost sacred barrier; but locked, it became a thing of majesty, hardly to be passed by in the hall without a feeling of awe.

Mynheer van Donselaar was sitting in his arm-chair, with his head in his hands.

"Papa," said Dorothy, "I must speak to you. And you must listen to me, if you please."

"Dorothea," said her father in broken tones, "go away."

"No, papa, I cannot go away," answered the daughter boldly. "I am the only woman in the family, and as such I have a right to speak. Mine is the woman's side of the business. Is it true, papa, that Karel is going to India?"

"Yes, Dorothea."

"And what is to become of the—the girl? Of course, I understand that there is a girl in the matter. Besides, Koos admitted as much. What is to become of the girl, papa?"

"That surely, Dorothea, is no business of yours."

"But it is my business, and, unless you will speak to me about it, I must find out for myself. I am resolved, papa, to do what I can for the girl."

"I shall do what is right," said Mynheer van

Donselaar, removing his face from his hands and resuming his ordinary pompous manner. "I shall have the girl's circumstances carefully inquired into, and I shall see that she is pecuniarily compensated and enabled to marry some worthy person in her own station of life. Be sure that I shall do all that is just, and more than is just, for the creature to whom you unwisely allude."

"Papa," said Dorothy, "I cannot agree with you, and that's why I wanted to speak to you about the matter. As Miss Varelkamp says in that—that other case, the girl is not fit to marry another man, papa. For, you see, she is Karel's wife."

"What folly is this?" said Mynheer van Donselaar angrily. "I have trouble enough at this moment, I should think, Dorothy, without your coming to me with such mischievous folly. In a few hours I take Karel away to Amsterdam."

"You are resolved?" cried Dorothy, in a tremor of excitement; "you refuse to give him a chance of redeeming the past? You separate him from the woman, and thereby render his repentance impossible? Is it so, papa?"

"If you choose to put it like that—yes."

"It is a crime, papa. I have warned you; I can do no more."

She was going, but he called her back. In the

abandonment of his sons, his heart clung to his only daughter with an unaccustomed tenderness.

"Dorothea," he said, "do you really mean that you think it would contribute to any one's happiness, if this transient caprice were to be welded by us into a lasting chain? Do you think it would be for the wretched girl's benefit any more than for Karel's?"

"I don't know about that, papa," said Dorothy; "but I know it would be right. And I know also, that, if once society recognised it to be inevitable, there would be an end of all that seducing of women which is the curse of the race."

"These are Miss Varelkamp's notions," said Mynheer van Donselaar pettishly, "an old maid's notions, and utterly impracticable. I tell you, Dorothea, that there could be no greater misery imaginable for this servant-girl than to make her Mevrouw van Donselaar. And the boy would have the good sense to reject such a plan."

"The greater coward he!" cried Dorothy with flashing eyes. "What, then, did he think of, or intend, when he stole upon her innocence?" The angry tears welled forward, but she forced them back.

"Hush! hush!" said mynheer. "These are no subjects for you, daughter. But," he added, as a sudden thought struck him, "if you speak like that,

then, Dorothy, your quondam lover would have to marry Madame de Mongelas?"

"Papa," stammered Dorothy. "Don't speak of it. Yes."

"Do you mean that? Does she mean that? With all the misfortunes it would entail? You are a pair of fools, then, child. Do you mean that you are ready to support your principle into its most extravagant consequences; that, if I allow Karel to offer his hand to Mejuffrouw Cornélia, you will promise me never again to think of becoming the wife of Arnout Oostrum?"

"Is it a bargain you are offering me, papa?"

"Yes," he said, somewhat rashly perhaps, but the promise was worth obtaining, and he knew that Karel would scoff at the proposal.

She did not so firmly accept this latter contingency, and, for the moment, the struggle thus to gain her point was violent within her. Then her simple integrity gained the day.

"Papa," she said, "I don't want to deceive you. I must tell you that I already considered myself bound in the sight of God never to become the wife of Arnout Oostrum as long as he can marry Madame de Mongelas."

"And yet you love him?"

"Yes, papa, I love him still."

"Dorothea," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "I

respect your motives, though I cannot understand them; but I assure you that your suggestions for Karel's punishment—and such they practically become—exceed anything that simple cruelty could devise. It is unreasonable, and we will say no word about the matter. I am going to leave for Amsterdam, as I told you, in a few hours. I shall stay with Karel till he embarks. And I shall take the same opportunity of looking for a house. We are going to leave Steenevest, Dorothy. We are going back to Amsterdam."

"Going to leave Steenevest? Oh, papa!"

"Yes, child; at least, for a time. I am not sure yet whether I shall sell the house. But I must return to the office, Dorothy. I cannot leave Koos to manage affairs alone. He is too young; and he fiddles too well. He has not a business-head."

CHAPTER VIII.

GRÂCE POUR MOI.

"You have been out with the American again," said Madame de Mongelas. "He undoubtedly has excellent cigars, but you smoke too many of them, Arnout. You retain the smell. I am the last woman in the world to object to smoking; you know I like an occasional cigarette myself; but one must not notice the smell. There is nothing so odious and so un-'comme-il-faut.'"

"If I am odious," said Arnout, "I will go downstairs again."

"No, you will not do so detestable a thing, but you will stay upstairs with me and make yourself agreeable. Now my foot is well again, or nearly well, I am dying of ennui. It is too hot to go out, and I like the heat, only I must have 'B. and S.'s,' as Mr. Doyer says, and conversation. Lucille reads to me, but she mispronounces all her words as soon as she sees them on paper. I have hardly seen you all day, Arnout. You are not 'gentil.'"

"You are late in discovering the fact," said Arnout.

"Heaven, let us have no bickerings, no recriminations! There is nothing I abhor so much. You are a Prince Charming when you choose, *mon cher*, but you do not always choose. Or let me say, if you like, that the fault is mine. A woman's caprices! *Des vapeurs!* Shall I play to you? Very well, then you must open the piano. Do you know, Arnout, you have very greatly improved in music since you have had the advantage of my tuition. Your taste was bad—do not be angry with me for saying so—and you did not know the difference between the two Bachs."

"The two Bachs?" queried Arnout.

"Offenbach and Sebastian. There is a difference. I believe you would recognise it by this time."

"Tormentor!" said Arnout, laughing. "There are a great many things you have taught me, and I am quite willing to admire your taste; but you needn't tell me that you appreciate Bach. He is not in your line. Play me that Spanish dance with the staccato in the middle—you know, the castanets—if you don't feel inclined to sing."

"I am not flattered, as you perhaps think I might be, by your admiration of my taste," she said, as she arranged her music and drew off her bracelets. "It is only vanity displaced. You are not at all a coxcomb, *Mynheer Oostrum*; you are only unconsciously vain. It is the worst form of the disease—

the chronic one; we women usually have both kinds at once."

She struck a few chords, and then glided into a Hungarian rhapsody. She played on, dropping from one tune into another, through a succession of dances, avoiding, with a waywardness which frequently came upon her, especially of late, the particular one for which Arnout had asked. She played brilliantly, showily, with what we call "accuracy and finish," as they play who can give nothing in music except what they have been taught, but who can give that to the very last iota, and who have been taught well. She enjoyed listening to her own faultless runs and roulades, and she skipped to and fro over the piano in a triumph of ease and grace. Was she a musician? Well, she never sat down to the piano without wondering whether her auditors liked—the view.

She stopped at last, to take rest. Arnout had gone to the open window—a great window thrown back from the balcony, through which the soft warm air stole in, lightened by the light of ten thousand stars. Round the huge scarlet shade of the lamp numberless insects were fluttering and buzzing, and Jacko, a silken grey bundle on the Turkish tablecloth, was trying in vain to catch some of them, skipping to and fro over the books and between the flower glasses, to the imminent danger of all things

breakable, and of the gigantic crystal lamp in particular. Arnout carried him off to the balcony, protesting and spluttering, and there strove to make him dance to the music. Jacko *could* dance, but he now absolutely refused to do it. Ever since he had been rescued from the misery of fairs, he had resolutely dropped the accomplishment which reminded him of his former squalor, just as the gentlemen who are called late in life to country squiredom sink the shop and forget the price of tea.

"Why didn't you play my Spanish dance?" asked Arnout. "The one I asked you for?"

She threw a glance at him full of mischievous mutiny, and for only answer struck another half dozen chords on the piano, and then broke into song—into song which he knew only too well—

"L'amour est enfant de Bohème."

"Not that," he said passionately, leaving the monkey and coming forward. "Not that, Dorine. Sing something else. I don't like it."

"Why not?" she asked in surprise—in genuine surprise—breaking off abruptly.

"I don't know," he said fiercely. "I don't like it. I am afraid of it. Sing something else."

"No," she said with something like a pout, "I won't. Why should I? You merely say it to vex

me. And you know it is a favourite of mine. I like that energy of the last line.

“‘Et si je t’aime, prends garde à toi!’”

She struck some of the notes as she ceased speaking. But he caught her by the arm.

“I will not stay to hear you sing it,” he said hoarsely. “There is the very devil in you sometimes, Dorine.”

“Mon cher, you are more than ridiculous; you are insulting. I was singing for your own pleasure, not for mine, and I will select something else if you prefer it. Let go my hand. What shall it be? Ah, I know.”

And she sang the great aria from “Robert.” He shrank back from the piano under the shade of the heavy window curtain, looped up in an Italian drapery, and stood listening and looking at her. She went through the first verse steadily, her splendid voice ringing out the wild appeal into the breathless night, faultlessly devoid of any shriek in its agonised cry. And then she came to the second. She sang that also till the desperate words repeated themselves. Then her voice faltered, she stopped, she started up from the piano, and came towards Arnout. She swept him with her on to the balcony out into the night. And they stood there for a moment,

breathless, motionless, in the tranquil, balmy glory of the starlit summer night.

"Grâce," she said very softly, "grâce pour toi-même. Et grâce pour moi."

And then they fell into each other's arms with kisses and tears.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS DONSELAAR HAS NO TROUBLES.

"You, then, must help me; you, who have done the wrong, should at least afford me what remedy you can. For you, far more than she whom I once loved to call 'Tante Suze,' have driven me forth from home, from the nest under the eaves. I don't regret going—don't think I regret it—only let me go in peace. They have told me that you loved me, and that I deserted you. I know it is not true, for I know that you drove me away. But I want you to *tell* me it is not true; I want to see it in black and white, in your handwriting, that I am indifferent to you; that you are glad I am gone. I am happy here: do not think I am not happy; but leave me my happiness—leave me to retain your memory without sorrow and without regret,—above all, without regret. Tell me then, for pity's sake, that you too are happy, the happier because I no longer sign myself

"Your

"ARNOUT OOSTRUM."

Dorothy laid down the letter upon the rustic table in front of her, in the little log-hut at Steenevest.

The postman had just brought it. Even now he was coming back along the avenue from the house where he had been to fetch the letters for the mail. He touched his cap again to the young lady in passing. "Dag, Jan," she said.

And then she took the letter up and read it over once more. It took long to read, this second time, and yet it was very short. The first time she had flashed through it, photographing the whole contents upon her mind in one instant. Now it seemed to her as if she could not go slowly enough to grasp the full meaning of every word. She lingered over the short, sharp sentences, and considered them involved. She wished that, if he must write to her, he would express himself more clearly. But he had no business to write to her. How dare he do it? She told herself that she was very angry with him for daring. And then she smiled, for she knew her own heart better than most girls of her age, and she did not believe in her wrath.

But presently there came upon her, as she sat gazing at the letter, the recollection of—that woman—the woman who was with him, the woman who had ruined him. It was from that woman's side, perhaps with her knowledge, that he wrote. Dorothy's

colour rose, and she felt her anger rising with it. No, hardly with her knowledge, yet in her presence, and while still contaminated by her touch. Perhaps the paper was hers. It was of foreign make, thick and unglazed, neither the shape nor the texture of the dirty-white sheets with "Bath" in the corner, which Arnout was accustomed to use at home. She felt a feminine curiosity to know where he had got such beautiful paper. Could it really be out of Madame de Mongelas's writing-case? She lifted it to her scornful little nose. It was perfumed, probably the favourite perfume of that creature. She flung it away from her. Her eyes flashed. No, indeed! How could he dare to write to her, and on this paper! "I am happy: do not think I am unhappy." What right had he to speak to her thus? Of such happiness as was his. He was insulting; he was shameless. She was angry in good truth.

Most certainly she was angry. Nevertheless, she got up and fetched the letter back, and spread it out once more upon the table. She was very, very sorry for Arnout.

Not sorry only. She had never denied, neither to herself, nor to her father, nor to Miss Varelkamp, that she loved the man who had once asked her to be his wife. It was no use denying it. She would have liked to be his wife. Ever since that evening when her father's unreasonable refusal had supplied

her with the answer she was in search of, it had been useless to deny the fact. She did not wish to.

But she had found a certain satisfaction in the thought that Arnout was contented with his choice. He had told te Bakel that he did not wish to return to Wyk. Miss Varelkamp's letter to Madame de Mongelas had remained unanswered. And Arnout himself had given no token to any of his former friends that he desired for a change in his condition. There was much, undoubtedly, that Dorothy could not but most deeply regret. The woman whom Arnout had chosen to share his life was not a fit companion for him. She was a Roman Catholic, and not even an earnest one. She was much older than he; she belonged to an altogether different class and nation. It must be doubted whether she would make him happy. But he loved her. To simple-minded Dorothy all these obstacles were the greater proofs of his all-conquering affection. He loved her—madly, with a passion which she could not understand, but which, in men, judging by the not very numerous novels she had read, was by no means uncommon. Then there were the poets—and of these she had read a good many—"Hero and Leander;" "Troilus and Cressida;" "Romeo and Juliet," and all the rest. Love, in men, always rejoiced in the strangest combinations and the most awful impediments. They climbed up to it, by preference,

in the very jaws of death, and in the teeth of common sense. No wonder that Arnout should love unfitly. Unfitness was of the essence of love.

But she was content to think he should be happy in his choice. After all, no man could alter it. And the one thing that remained to be done now, Miss Suzanna was striving to do it—to bind him definitely to the woman whom he had preferred before all others, that he might call her his.

Said Dorothy to herself: "I have been selfish. And foolish. My father was wiser than I. It was out of courtesy—out of chivalrous impulse, let me rather call it—that Arnout Oostrum offered his hand to me when he did. He would never have done it had he not felt called upon to come to my rescue. And it was from the same impulse that he repeated his offer after my father's refusal. He can never have loved me. For, had he loved me, he could not have loved Madame de Mongelas."

And she was wounded at the thought of this chivalry, bestowed not for her sake, but for his own. I think, had she been left to herself, her pride would soon have conquered all weak hankering after runaway Arnout. And, besides, an honest Dutch maiden does not go on loving the man who shows that he will not have her.

But this letter disturbed her in the repose into which she had fallen. It wanted not her warm

young heart to read between the lines. When her outburst of indignation against the Frenchwoman had died away—no, she could make *no* allowances for Madame de Mongelas—her interest once more centred on this man whom she loved, and whose thoughts, from the strange vortex of passion into which he had deliberately cast himself, now turned, of all women, to her. Let him reiterate that he was happy. It was not true. There was something in the tone of the letter which told her it was not true. He was unhappy, restlessly unhappy, and he wrote it to her.

Did he love her still? Tush! He had never loved her. And he expressly told her it was not this which caused him unhappiness. She sat silent, with meditative eyes, gazing out across the strip of lawn and the flower-beds, and the meadows stretching far and wide, in which the cows were browsing. One of them, an old grey one, attracted her attention for a moment. The animal seemed dissatisfied with its food.

He was unhappy—oh, disgraceful thought!—because he feared that she was pining for him; because he feared that he had acted wrongly towards her, had acted—unkindly. Dorothy felt herself growing hot and cold. Unkindly! Not with proper consideration. The old chivalry again! It was his duty to be courteous to this good and affectionate little girl. Perhaps he ought to have married her

from chivalry, and courtesy, and kindness. "They tell me I have deserted you." Perhaps they told him she had said so. And perhaps they added that she had said that she wanted him back! She got up hastily, and fairly ran away from her own thoughts.

She must go and seek comfort of Miss Varelkamp. They were much together, nowadays, these two women, and each comforted the other without words. Dorothy put on a garden-hat and ran down the quiet lane. It was coming on to rain, but she did not notice that.

She met Mejuffrouw Varelkamp at a turn of the road. Suzanna had been visiting some of her poor. She had an empty basket with her and a bundle of tracts. There had been no alteration in her daily occupations, for she had seen no reason to make it. Of course she knew that it was not customary—even outside the confines of religion—for one human creature to endeavour to shorten the days of another; but she had never pretended that religion made you good. On the contrary, she had always fiercely asserted that it was the unrighteousness of rationalism to think so. And, even admitting that murder was wicked, she did not feel at all convinced that she had acted so very wrongly in trying to remove the Frenchwoman from her nephew's path. How much of her own theory she believed, and how much she fancied she believed, it would be hard to determine.

But she convinced herself with the more eagerness, the louder her doubts became. And with that inconstancy which we all show when matters come to a crisis, she denied the most salient point in her character, and was unjust to the Frenchwoman. And her only regret—or, at least, so she told herself—the passionate reproach which never left her day or night, was this, that she had probably been chiefly instrumental by her unwisdom in preparing Arnout's ruin, and that she had, through her final rashness, brought about a catastrophe which might otherwise have been avoided. It might have been—but for her! Whatever her crime may have deserved, in that unresting thought lay punishment enough.

Was she really never sorry for her deed? Who shall say? She would have told you, No. But, then, she was the very worst judge of the matter.

And she went and visited her poor, and distributed her tracts, and she said—to Dorothy, once—that her conscience was at rest, but that her heart was very sad because of the injury she had done to the one creature on earth whom she loved with all-absorbing love. She must expiate that injury to him as best she could. And then she could lay down her head and die.

Probably she really desired to die, if this were once effected, for she would have nothing left to live

for. But her health remained very good, and there was no reasonable prospect of her early removal.

In the mean time she went on digging her grave by all the means in her power, that is to say, she left no stone unturned to effectuate—what she dreaded most of all things, as the end of every chance of happiness to her—a legal union between Arnout and Madame de Mongelas.

She did what she could. She wrote to Madame de Mongelas, but her letter remained unanswered. She could not write to Arnout; there was a gulf between them which she dared not bridge over. And, woman that she was, she did not feel the same compunction towards Madame de Mongelas.

By Jakob te Bakel's help she instituted inquiries in Paris with regard to the viscountess's antecedents. An Amsterdam agent for such confidential investigations was carrying them on; they were in progress at this moment, and she daily expected to be made acquainted with the results.

And in the mean time she lived her daily life, going the insignificant round of her duties. Only she was sterner, harder, more lonely, and more uncompromising than ever. Pleasures she had never had—except denying herself for Arnout's sake—and to this solitary distraction she now devoted herself with greater energy than ever. The strict economy of the little house tightened into positive want.

Suzanna had never had any extra pence, and she now laid aside many a much-needed penny towards meeting the expenses already incurred and those which she saw looming in the distance. She cut down Betje ruthlessly, allowing her less meat and less butter every week; and Betje, though she grew visibly—not thinner, that was impossible, nor paler exactly; let us rather say less red—only grumbled because the Juffrouw had given up butter altogether as well as the sugar in her tea.

“I will walk home with you, Miss Varelkamp, if you will allow me,” said Dorothy; “there are some things I should like to talk to you about.”

“What is it?” said Suzanna quickly in a low voice. Her thoughts leaped at once to the subject which never deserted her.

“Nothing of much importance,” answered Dorothy, alarmed by the earnestness of her manner. “We have plenty of time to talk about various matters. May I walk home with you? Have you been to see Baas Vroom?”

“Girl,” said Suzanna, “do not try to deceive me. You have news of—of him. Has he written? What is it? Has he come back?”

“No, no, dear Tante Suze!” cried Dorothy, touched to the heart by the yearning look in the sharp old face. “Let us walk on, and I will tell you.”

"I must know—now," said Suzanna, stopping in the middle of the road. She clutched her grey woollen dress with the hand that held the empty basket, and drew her skirts about her. Her hands looked very bony in their coarse grey cotton gloves; her eyes blinked once or twice, and her chin trembled.

It was getting dark, for the clouds were sinking lower, and great heavy drops of rain were beginning to fall.

"He has written," said Suzanna. "And you are going to show me the letter."

Silently Dorothy drew it out of her pocket and held it towards the old maid.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp took it, and stood reading it. The long road was deserted but for these two desolate figures, arrested half-way. Over the wide fields on both sides black tracts of clouds were driving, and fierce gusts of wind dashed every now and then through the trees along the border. The rain came down faster—with a rush.

It was not till Miss Varelkamp had done reading the letter that she stooped to draw up her old skirt, revealing the grey knitted petticoat underneath.

She pinned this up with great neatness and precision, and she fastened her spotless handkerchief over her bonnet, and then, when her arrangements were concluded, she said quietly—

"Perhaps it will be only a shower. Let us try and shelter in Baas Vroom's cottage at the end of the road. I was coming away from there."

They walked rapidly in that direction. Neither spoke. But at last Dorothy could bear it no longer. "Well?" she asked.

Miss Varelkamp turned her face towards her young companion. "Shall I tell you?" she said in a hoarse voice. "Ought I to tell you? Poor thing!"

"What?" asked Dorothy tremulously. "You frighten me, Tante Suze! What is it?"

"He loves you still."

They did not exchange another word until they reached the cottage. Dorothy's colour came and went. But, as they stood, all dripping and bedraggled, shaking off the rain before they claimed admittance, she said with sudden vehemence: "He does not love me. He pities me, and he wants to be very good and gentle. And I must give him the answer he requires."

Suzanna only shook her head with mournful emphasis, and they went into the cottage together.

"I am not going to deny," said old Baas Vroom, sitting up among the pillows in his armchair, "that the rain may be an arrangement of the Almighty's, but then the rheumatiz isn't. Or, if the rheumatiz is, as you've been telling me all the morning, juffrouw,

then the rain can't be; I feel certain. For the Almighty can't have created both the rain and the rheumatiz; the two of them together are more than mortal flesh can bear."

"Hush, hush, father!" said his daughter, going up to him. "Here is the Juffrouw van Donselaar."

Everybody in the village liked Dorothy's sweet face.

"I see her," growled her father, somewhat modifying his querulous tone. "She don't know what troubles are, she doesn't. They talk about it's raining blessings. But it only does that on some people's fields."

"At any rate, I have had more than my share to-day, Baas Vroom," said Dorothy's kind voice. "I got drenched, as you see. Drenched. And I have come to appeal to your hospitality. You mustn't be rude to a guest."

The old crosspatch scowled, hugely delighted. But he went on with his grumbling. "Juffrouw Varelkamp says I must be contented," he said. "And so I am. But I don't see why I should sit all day inventing imaginary blessings. I don't believe in things I don't see."

"What do you call blessings?" asked Dorothy. "Your nice cottage here, and your daughter to look after you and nurse you—what do you call these?"

The old man shook his head. "Them's not blessings," he said.

"Then what are, you ungrateful creature?" queried Miss Varelkamp sharply.

"Baccy," answered the Baas promptly, "and broth from the great house, and new-laid eggs, and smoked beef and—and——"

"And gin," snapped Juffrouw Varelkamp.

"And gin," acquiesced the old gentleman readily. "Blessings is all the things as poor people doesn't have."

"And when poor people have them, they leave off being blessings?" suggested Dorothy, with a wicked merriment in her eyes.

"Yes," said the old invalid. He was not going to gainsay so palpable a truth. And he fell into a fit of coughing.

His daughter came round to Dorothy and drew her aside, trying to remove the wet from her garments as best she could. Until now she had been similarly employed with the older lady.

"He is very faint, juffrouw," she said in a low voice, with a movement of her thumb in the direction of her parent. She had got into his way of misquoting Bible texts. "He is very faint, juffrouw, but he's dreadful pursuing. Dear, dear, the fainter he gets the more pursuing he becomes to me, I assure you. I'm worried half out of my life."

She did not say "worried," but she gave its Dutch equivalent. She said: *Gekoeieneerd*.

"I'm out of spirits," remarked the old man meanwhile significantly to Miss Varelkamp, and he heaved a deep sigh. "I'm out of spirits, juffrouw, and I've been so ever since Saturday. It's very hard on a poor old fellow that used to have plenty once, and of the right kind too." And he twinkled his wicked little eyes. He was an old reprobate, and he dearly loved his joke. Miss Varelkamp's severity of manner made as little impression upon him as Miss Varelkamp's tracts.

"I've read about little Pieter," he went on. "He was a very worthy lad, was little Pieter, and he made an edifying end. But I should like to have seen child of mine who would have dared to speak to his parents in the way that little Pieter did when he reproved his drunken pa. I suppose it's because the good children all die in their youth, juffrouw, that the parents are always bad in the books."

"But I am not going to die," he cried fiercely after a moment's silence. "Bring me my pipe, Willemijntje; I can smoke it when the ladies are gone. I tell you, I won't die. What d'ye come here for and make me think I'm going to? I'm thankful for the soup, and the medicine. But I know what the visits mean. You ladies don't come to visit poor people like us till you think that we're 'confiscated,'

and then you think it's your duty to look in and give us a helping hand into your heaven. I won't go to your heaven. We've lived apart, and we'll die apart, and if I must go anywhere it'll be to a heaven of my own, Juffrouw Varelkamp, where the poor people get together and feed off rich men's flesh. There's nothing in the Bible about rich men going to heaven, it's the other place that the rich man went to. I want to"—he almost lifted himself in his chair—"I want to be left in peace. I am not going to die, I tell you. I won't die. Go away, Juffrouw Varelkamp, and tell the Dominé I said so. And you, dear, good Juffrouw van Donselaar, get the cook to send me some more chicken-soup, for the love of your pretty eyes, and give me something to buy necessities. Sickness is a very bad thing for poor people, but—sickness—*isn't*—death." He sank back among his cushions, and covered his face with his hands.

"Let us go," said Miss Varelkamp sternly. "The rain has almost ceased."

Dorothy hesitated.

"Oh, don't mind him, please, juffrouw," said the affrighted Willemyn, "it's only his way. He often goes on like that. We're not really as poor as he says. We can get on very well, thank you, juffrouw; and we were very grateful for the soup."

"You *are* poor, Willemyntje," said Miss Varel-

kamp severely. "Very poor. It's nothing to be ashamed of. And nothing to boast about. I am poor also. Perhaps not quite as poor as you are, but certainly nearer to you than to Miss van Donseelaar. Good day. Don't forget the bandages, and that you must put them on cold."

The idea of Miss Varelkamp's poverty was both bewildering and amusing to Willemyn. She could distinguish only two classes, her own and the ladies, the poor and the rich. Miss Varelkamp was a lady, therefore Miss Varelkamp was rich. She dropped a timid curtsy when Dorothy slowly followed Suzanna, slipping as she went one of her own not too numerous rix-dollars into the girl's reluctant hand.

Jacob te Bakel was limping up and down in front of Juffrouw Varelkamp's cottage. They could see from afar, by his restless manner, that he was a prey to overpowering agitation. His whole lank frame was quivering with excitement. He could not keep it still.

"I have news for you, Juffrouw Varelkamp," he cried, as they hurried towards him. "Good news, as I take it. Excellent news!"

"Well, what is it?" she panted, seizing hold of his arm.

"Madame de Mongelas is not a widow at all. She is married, and her husband is alive."

CHAPTER X.

SUZANNA SPEAKS HER MIND.

"You remember," said Suzanna, as soon as they were alone, "what you promised me on the evening of that terrible Sunday?"

"Yes," said Dorothy gently.

"And you are willing to perform it? Any sacrifice, if only it be for his lasting good?"

"Dear Tante Suze, what would you have of me?"

"He loves you, Dorothy—nay, do not deny it, your heart must tell you it is so—and you love him. But you can never be united upon earth. It is not merely your father's will and your filial obedience. These might change at any moment. The form of Madame de Mongelas stands irrevocably between you."

"But if she has deserted her husband——" began Dorothy involuntarily.

"That is her sin, not his, for he never knew it. I am sure he does not know it even yet. She is a Papist. I do not know what rules of morality she

has or ought to have. Perhaps she need not have any. I have always told you it is his soul alone I am thinking of. And him I must save. Dorothy, I must save him, whatever becomes of me. He must still marry Madame de Mongelas. Ay, he must marry her all the more certainly because of this revelation which Jakob has brought."

"But, Tante Suze——"

"Listen to me; have patience with me. I am only a poor old woman fighting for my love. This woman, dearest, she has been his cause of stumbling. And only by deserting her can his love, his passion—call it what you will—his choice become a sin, the most horrible of sins. I call it his choice, and that is enough for me. If the choice be wrong or right, herewith I have nothing to do. But he has chosen. It is too late. Dorothy, let me say it once more—it is the holiest conviction of my heart; I have ruined my life to remain true to it—the man who once chooses a woman to be his is wedded to her, and wedded to her for ever—all separation is desertion, all subsequent union is—hush, let us not say the word. If all women thought as I, the world would be, I do not say a Paradise—for how do I know?—but a better and purer place than it is now. It is because they do not think so, because they do not care, that men are what they are. There is no alternative for Arnout. He must either remain true

to his wife, or he must desert her. He may not, he cannot desert her. And you, Dorothy, you could not, by marrying him, now he is married, stoop to——” She stopped.

“But it is Madame de Mongelas who is married already,” said Dorothy.

“No; the Frenchwoman is divorced. On her own head be her guilt. She has deserted her home; she has committed the crime from which I must save my boy. The Vicomte de Mongelas is no longer her husband.”

“Jakob said that he was,” interposed Dorothy.

“In name, child. So be it. But once more I ask you, are these matters social conventionalities? Dorothy, oh, my blood can boil within me! Nowadays, in our civilised communities, the covenant of marriage, what is it but a stroke of the registrar’s pen? Have they sold you your little paper—what do they call it—certificate? Oh, it’s all right; then you’re married. You whose names are down, because you told him to put them there—A. and E. Never mind about B., who possesses all those holy claims with which the registrar has nothing to do. Never mind about B. at home in her garret with her deserted infant. Is there a baby? So much the worse for it, and for B. Call in the right reverends to bless the civil marriage, and to sanctify it! In the name of the Father, etc. God’s curse upon you,

smooth-faced priests of Venus, who daily hallow adultery by the blessings of the Church!"

She was violently excited. Her wan face flushed, her whole being trembled beneath the storm that swept over it. She paced up and down the room with her hands clasped in front of her.

"Hush, hush, dear tante!" said Dorothy, rising to take her hand and draw her down upon the sofa.

But she gently shook her off. "Girl," she said, "I tell you I have sacrificed my whole life—and the best of us can give but that—to the holiness of this truth I advocate. And now, in my old age, I am called upon to vindicate it once more. It is not my fault if others, such as your father or your brother, think differently. The Frenchwoman is separated from her husband. She is separated by that crime for which the Bible sanctions divorce. I must, then, obtain of her husband that he now divorce her, legally, where morally she is no longer his. What else can I do? It is right that it should be so."

"But divorce," said Dorothy in an awe-struck tone, "is that not always a wickedness?"

"No," said Suzanna vehemently, "not of the deserted one. Only of the deserter. Do you forget what our Saviour says?"

"But then, Tante Suze," asked Dorothy hesitat-

ingly, "why did you not try to obtain that Madame de Mongelas should—desert Arnout?"

"Girl," almost shrieked Suzanna, turning fiercely upon her, "do you also tempt me—like the minister of God? Do you not think I have yearned for it, day and night? Do you not think I have longed to offer her every penny I possessed if she would leave him? Who am I that I should persuade even mine enemy to mortal sin? I could take it upon myself for his sake, and I did so; but what of the other—of the Papist—of her?"

Dorothy gazed at her, without speaking, but she read the question in the girl's eyes.

"I know what you would say. Who am I, a would-be murderess, to shrink from guilt? Well, yes, I, a would-be murderess. But the guilt of that deed was mine, for his sake, none other's but mine. I must bear it, and account for it, and expiate it. And I cannot draw others on to wickedness for him. I cannot, I cannot," she repeated wildly, as if struggling with herself. "Do you not see that I cannot? I have proved it to myself over and over again. If I am wrong, I can't help it. If you don't understand human hearts, I can't help it. Leave me in peace with my own wickedness, and my own thoughts of right and wrong. Perhaps some day I shall weep tears of blood for my mad hate of that woman, and what it led to. Do you think it would have led me

so far if I had thought of these matters as other women think? Because I knew that not a moment's whim but his whole life's vocation was trembling in the balance, because I knew that from that night's supreme decision there could be no repentance, no remission, no turning back, because—because—oh, my God, because——” She could get no farther. She buried her face in her hands and stood trembling like an aspen.

“Your sacrifice,” said Dorothy softly, “shall be mine.”

And then Suzanna moved from her attitude of suspense. She came up to Dorothy and kissed her on the forehead.

“I must go to Paris myself,” she said, “tomorrow. Nobody else can do it. Is it far, Paris? Have you any idea how far it is?”

CHAPTER XI.

DOYER TELLS SUZANNA'S STORY.

"You are too much in earnest, my young friend," said Mr. Doyer, leaning back behind the blue curls of his cigar smoke, and stretching out his legs. "Or rather you are, if you will allow me to say so, not earnest in the proper place. You take seriously those things which you ought to treat with greater facility; and, on the whole, you are perhaps inclined to pass over too lightly those matters of life which are of the most vital interest."

"It all depends on what one considers important," said Arnout moodily.

"That is true. I agree with you. The hotel-keeper here has really very decent whisky."

"Now, I consider there is nothing of greater importance in creation than this question of the love which one human being bears to another. It is the only thing worth living for."

"There I cannot agree with you," said Doyer, still watching his tobacco smoke.

"What then," cried Arnout, "is there else?"

"Money making," said the American coolly. He brought down his eyes from the ceiling, and emptied his coffee cup.

"That is horrible," said the young Dutchman with a shudder. "Horrible! All the difference between the stars and—an ink-blot. The thoughts of an angel, and the vomit of a dog."

"You are poetical," replied the older man quietly, though a faint colour underspread his dried-out cheeks; "and you are graphic. Granted. It is another matter whether you are just. It is all very well to speak scornfully of money, young sir; but will you allow me to draw your attention to one circumstance? There is no other way of living than either on the money you have earned for yourself or on the money that other people have earned for you. As long as that simple fact remains, the question will also remain, whether money-making is so very contemptible. I can understand, however, that love-making is preferable, especially to the young."

He poured himself out another cup of coffee, and very slowly and methodically lifted the milk jug. And, with his eyes intent upon the sluggish stream issuing from the spout, he added thoughtfully—as if speaking to himself—

"Even on another person's money."

For a moment Arnout hardly realised the words,

Only for a moment; then they crystallised, as it were, into shape in his brain, never to leave it again.

"Who are you," he cried, starting up with cheeks aflame, "to dare to address me thus? What right have you, with your insolence, to judge my conduct or my motives? Yes, sir—with your insolence. You are an old man, but I cannot regret the word. What right have you?"

"Hush, Arnout, sit down," said the stranger coolly. He did not remove his eyes from the milk jet, but, all the same, he did not seem to notice that the milk was overflowing his cup.

At the new insult of the half-mocking tone and the familiar use of his Christian name, young Oostrum clenched his fist.

"I assure you that such violence is very youthful. I am willing to answer your question, if you will only be quiet and sit down. What right have I? I am your father: that is all."

"You are pleased, sir," cried Arnout, "to be funny. To be impertinent, in one word, as well as insolent. For me it can only be painful to hold such parley as this with a man who is indeed old enough to be my father, as you say. I have the honour to wish you good evening, and, while thanking you for the kindness you have shown me in the past" (hang his cigars!), "I must request that in the future you will leave me in peace."

"D—n it," cried Doyer, throwing down the empty milk jug and also starting to his feet. "Stay here, you sir—Arnout, do you understand me? Listen to me,"—the young Dutchman continued his slow walk down the terrace. The American sprang after him, calling out, "Look here! Do you see this little revolver?"—he had drawn one from his pocket. "If you don't stop and hearken to what I've got to say, I'll send a bullet through your hat."

Arnout did not turn his head, and therefore he did not see the little revolver. But the next moment a bullet whizzed through his hat with a faint click, and went soaring away into the still air. It was not really a risky thing at that short distance—not even with a revolver—for a man who knew himself to be a first-rate shot.

"And the next," cried the stranger, his voice hoarse with agitation, "will be for your head, unless you stop."

But our stubborn young friend marched stolidly on. The American threw down his weapon with another oath. "You're plucky," he said, "there's no denying it. Come back, Arnout. It's Gospel truth I'm telling you. I *am* your father, so help me God!"

Oostrum stopped, hesitated, half turned round. The other's tone was not that of a man who was joking. Perhaps he was deranged in his mind.

"Come and sit down and listen quietly. It's a long story, but I won't tell you all of it to-night. I am your father, as I said to you. It's nothing to be so very angry about."

"My father is dead," said Arnout.

"Not if he knows it, he ain't. Nor don't mean to be for yet awhile, boy! Pretty lively, thankee, considering that dig in the ribs he got in San Domingo," said the stranger, dropping into English. Then he went on in French: "No, my son, you may still rejoice in the possession of a parent. Would you like to hear him talk Dutch? It is sixteen or seventeen years since he left his mother-country, but he can still say 'Asjeblief, meneer.'" He held out a chair to Arnout as he spoke the last two words.

Arnout came back to the table and, taking up the revolver, which still lay where Doyer had thrown it down, he quietly dropped it over the balusters into the basin of a fountain underneath. "I don't like firearms," he said, "in the hands of—" he checked himself—"those that use them." And then he sat down, with his hands in his pockets, and waited for what was to come. He did not believe the stranger even yet.

That gentleman poured himself out two little drams of whisky in succession, and drank them off. Then he said—

"It's all true, every word of it. I was coming

to Holland on purpose to see what had become of you, when what must I do but run across you in that Cologne hotel. Name? I know your name well enough, though it isn't mine. No more is Doyer. I took that on so as you shouldn't spot me first sight. I haven't been ashamed of my name, not even when I got into pretty scrapes with it. I've always pulled it through the bramble bushes somehow, and managed to get my pickings where I could. You're Arnout Oostrum, you are. And I'm Arnout Donselaar."

"Donselaar!" cried Arnout. "You are Dorothy's uncle that ran away!"

"That was shipped off abroad, if you like. It was no running of mine; and besides, I was past forty. I'm many years older than my immaculate brother, but he got together a family council all the same, and they bundled me out of the kingdom. I can't say I was loth to go, even though I had to leave you behind."

Arnout made a gesture of impatience.

"No, my boy, it's no use your denying it. You're Arnout Oostrum. It was your mother's name, and it's yours. I hear she died not long after I left the kingdom, and then, it appears, Suzanna Varelkamp turned up in the nick of time to look after you."

"Then, if this story be true, you deserted my mother?" said Arnout in a trembling voice.

"What could I do, boy? I hadn't above a thou-

sand florins in the world. I gave her three hundred of them. We had lived together, till my father's death brought on the crash."

"And what connection was there between Juffrouw Varelkamp and me?" queried Arnout anxiously.

"None whatever. That is to say—yes, I had better tell you everything. I was engaged to Juffrouw Varelkamp; I was to have married her. In fact, the date was fixed. It would have made another man of me. And, then, she found out—by accident—this about your mother, and she broke it off at once. She talked some nonsense about bigamy, and my being married already. She was a young girl at the time, and she told me she'd never have me as long as the other was my wife. I lived with your mother for many years afterwards, Arnout. She was a very good soul, but not the kind of person I could possibly marry, and, after a considerable time, when I saw that Suzanna was inexorable, you were born. It was very stupid of her, and I dare say that now she most deeply regrets it. The strangest part of the whole story is that I'm convinced she was as fond of me as any girl can be of a man, and I'm sure that I liked her well enough. Oh yes, I liked her. She wasn't by any means bad-looking, I can assure you. Yes, I always consider that Suzanna Varelkamp did me the greatest injury of my life. But she seems to have been good to you."

"When my mother died, deserted," said Arnout, looking away towards the dark mountains and the far black water, "I suppose I was penniless."

"Unless you had a penny in your pocket for sugar plums," answered Mr. Donselaar-Doyer jocosely. "I don't fancy she can have left much behind her."

"Thank you," said Arnout. "And now—supposing all this to be true—what is your object in recalling it?"

"Oh, hang it!" answered the newly found parent, "is that the light in which you look at the matter? Why, it's the—*what* d'ye call it?—the prodigal father's return, or some such thing. After all, you're my son, Arnout, and I want to see what I can make of you. It's very lonely, growing old alone, I can tell you. I've had a rough time of it for many years, and it wasn't till I thought that you'd find it worth your while that I made up my mind to come and look after you. I did it quick enough, then."

He crossed and uncrossed his legs, and then he poured himself out a fourth glass of whisky. Evidently he had not found the explanation as easy as he had hoped. Then he went on—

"It's just simply this. I'm rich now. I've a lot more money than I can possibly use for myself. I'll take you back. I'll make a man of you. We shall rub on very well together, I have no doubt; and I'll get them to give you my name over yonder, where

they've not those brutal Dutch laws. And there's that little filly of my brother's—the scoundrel!—didn't I understand you to say he had a daughter? Perhaps you might as well marry her, Arnout. I bet she'll have a pretty penny to her fortune. Trust the young curmudgeon, her father, for that.”

Arnout did not answer. He was lost in a maze of conflicting thoughts.

“Aunt Suzanna must have loved you very much,” he said at last. He was thinking of the life of sacrifice devoted to him, for his father's sake.

“The more fool she not to marry me. It's no use taking these things too seriously. And that's why I spoke to-night, although originally I had intended to wait a little longer. You are getting into a mess, my dear Arnout, with this French sister of yours. Trust me, you had better leave off in time. She is dazzlingly beautiful, and charming, and I can very well understand a young fellow having his head turned by her. But you have had it turned quite long enough. Never mind heads being turned as long as they don't get screwed in that position. And it's high time you were twisting round.”

“Sir!” began Arnout with all his hauteur.

“Nonsense! Surely your father may speak about the subject. I tell you that both you and she have had enough of each other. I can see what I can see. You quarrel. And you are out of sorts. This

is the moment to leave off, for this is the moment when things become serious. And, as I said at the beginning, if you once treat a light matter seriously, you will have to treat all the serious things of life lightly henceforth. Take warning by me. I have been very frank with you to-night that you might do so. Now, or never, is the moment to escape. If you once go on staying together, after you have left off wanting to do so, there is no reason why you should ever separate. And that, of course, is impossible, absurd. The woman is an adventuress."

"I will hear nothing," cried Arnout fiercely, "not even from you, against Madame de Mongelas."

"Tush! You are all for the tragic side. Passionate but pure—and that kind of thing. Suzanna's teaching, I suppose; though Suzanna's teaching has ended rummily enough with you, my boy. I don't quite see it. And, besides, I prefer blonde women. Well, you must just think it out. You now know my offer. Come with me, and be Arnout Donselaar; but I must say that my meaning is, minus Madame de Mongelas. How about my brother's daughter? You know her. Do you think she would do to make you a nice little wife?"

"Miss van Donselaar is a most lovely and most charming girl," said Arnout, glad of the shadow in which he sat.

"Come on. So much the better. Then we must have a wedding in a couple of months. I don't think her father'll object when he hears what I can do for you, and I should like to make up with my relations. And so 'Good-bye' to the ravishing Frenchwoman! What do you say?"

"I must see," said Arnout, "I must think of it."

"Do so, only not too long. Most decisions get the worse for being thought over after they were come to. And take to heart what I told you about love-making not being the most important thing in existence. It's the garnish—I don't deny it—but the solid dish is ambition. The making a name, and a fortune, and a position in the world, that's what a man puts his shoulder to the wheel for. I've made the fortune, and now I want my son to get the honours. You can't dawdle on for ever in orange-groves and under roses—and the money not even yours."

"Good night," said Arnout, rising to go.

"Good night, Arnout. I should think we might shake hands."

Arnout let his hand lie for a moment in the old gentleman's.

"And I think you might—just for the joke of the thing—not that I care for it. I'm not sentimental—dash it!—but because it would sound so comical,—you might just call me 'father' for once."

"Father, if you like, mynheer," said Arnout, and went his way.

"It's not nearly such good fun finding a son as I had expected," said the stranger to himself with a bitter sigh. "All the same, he's a good lad, a plucky lad, and a lad of spirit. I've watched him long enough, without his knowing it, and he has the making of a man in him. He's young still, and this love-affair is a foolish business, but it's the kind of thing that proves the mettle of a boy. He'll be all the better for it. Only I wish we were well through."

Arnout, leaning over his balcony in the darkness, had thoughts enough to occupy his mind. There was something pleasant, undoubtedly, to a young fellow who thought himself penniless a couple of hours ago, in the discovery of an utterly unexpected fortune, even when that fortune was handicapped by an objectionable parent. Perhaps he scarcely had a right to call this new-found progenitor objectionable. He certainly could not say that he felt drawn towards him. But here was the fortune, and the future name of van Donselaar, and every chance of consent from Dorothy's father, should that consent ever come to be asked.

He tore himself away at last from his own cogita-

tions, and stepped back into the room and lighted a candle.

The light revealed a letter lying on the table. It had doubtless come by the evening post, and been brought up into his room.

He glanced at the superscription, and tore it open. It was from Dorothy.

“DEAR ARNOUT,

“What would explanations avail, when they can alter neither the past nor the future? You have chosen your wife in the sight of God, and are bound to her by irrevocable ties. Love her, then, and be a good husband to her unto the end. I shall rejoice above all things to hear that you are happy, but I know that you will never be that till you have married her also in the sight of your fellow-men. Happiness is not a matter of temporary pleasure, or even of lasting worldly success. It is a matter of doing right.

“With the most earnest prayer for your well-being, bodily and spiritual, I shall ever remain your faithful friend,
DOROTHEA VAN DONSELAAR.”

He struck down the candle to the ground in a passion of he knew not what wrath and despair.

“Arnout,” cried a voice, disturbed in the stillness, “are you in your room? How long you have been

away! How late it is! Oh, it is wrong of you to leave me alone like this!"

"Dorine, Dorine!" he said to himself with vehemence, "you are the only creature in the world who has ever really loved me; and they want me to lose you. I love you, Dorine; I love you! I will never give you up!"

CHAPTER XII.

MEVROUW BARSSELIUS GOES TO SEE A BABY.

DOROTHY had written her letter a day or two before the limit accorded by Mevrouw Barsselius for Arnout's return. "You remember," Juffrouw Varelkamp had said to her, "that this worldly advantage is another which you are letting slip. It is of importance, especially as regards your father, for he is one of those men—you know it as well as I do—who pay attention to such matters. If he knew that my nephew Arnout was Mevrouw Barsselius's heir, he would probably be inclined to look with far more favour upon his suit. Now, I know my sister Anne-marie. She is good-natured, but she is pig-headed, and I fancy she will stick to her arrangements. At this moment the money is still there. Have you taken all this into account?"

"My dear Juffrouw, you are piling up the agony," Dorothy had answered. "Do you know, it is almost unkind."

"It is my duty," said Suzanna shortly. She sat bolt upright over her knitting. She still knitted un-

ceasingly. For she had quietly gone on with that dozen of woollen socks she had been getting ready for Arnout's winter provision. Only she dropped a stitch now and then, as she worked, at rare intervals, when she could not see clearly, because of that film between the needles and her eyes. "She is very hard-hearted," said the neighbours, as they passed by and saw her sitting under the shade of her window-curtain, ceaselessly knitting. They said so, because she had refused their sympathy indiscriminately, meeting all inquiries and insinuations with a frigid stare and a polite "My nephew has gone abroad for a time." Only to one or two of her most intimate Sunday cronies she had purposely added, "You will hear news of his formal engagement, probably, very soon; but do not speak of it to any one." The old ladies had told this bit of gossip all over the village, and the village shook its head, to a man, and looked unutterably wise.

Suzanna had been obliged to postpone her departure for a day or two, just long enough to procure a small sum of French money, and to arrange her few indispensable travelling things. She was to leave for Paris on Monday, the information with regard to Madame de Mongelas's husband having reached her on Thursday afternoon. She would not have travelled on a Sunday, not even, I fancy, to have saved Arnout's life.

But she would attempt a murder, you will say? Ah, that was to save his soul, a very different stake in Suzanna's estimation. Besides, although Suzanna persisted in fiercely looking upon herself as a murderess, and in vehemently rejoicing over her attempt to deliver her nephew, even by a crime, yet it must not be forgotten by those who judge her, that her deed was the outcome of a moment's frenzied confusion. Not much more, when you come to think of it, than the tremble of a hand. At least, that was what Madame de Mongelas said, after the first flash of anger and alarm. But Suzanna thought otherwise. And at the bottom of her heart, deep down under all the passion and the exultation, smouldered a fire of burning reproach for a sin that lay unconfessed.

Mevrouw Barsselius had anxiously counted the days as they passed, but it was not till they had actually exceeded their allotted number, that she realised how her cleverly conceived arrangement had failed. She came into her breakfast-room after a bad night—an unusual thing with her, in spite of her carefully cultivated asthma—and she complained bitterly to herself of the ungratefulness of poor relations, as she got ready her solitary cup of tea. She scolded Bijou, a new habit she had got into of late. Bijou had good reason—if only he had known it—to

regret the manifold delinquencies of Arnout Oostrum. But he did not know it, and he only came to the conclusion that his mistress was growing very cross and unmanageable, and that, really, he would have looked for some other place of residence, if she had not been so inordinately attached to cold chicken, a weakness he found himself quite able to share. He grumbled, then, as he crept into his basket, but, once in it, he soon fell asleep. And she grumbled, also, as she read over a charity prospectus which the postman had kindly brought her. She abused the promoters of the movement during the whole of her protracted breakfast, and then, finally, she crumpled up the paper and threw it into the slop basin. But next morning she sent them a rix-dollar with her compliments. She pulled an ugly face over the gift, as she did it up in a bit of white paper, but the recipients did not see the grimace, and they bless her memory to this day.

"I shall go and see Suzanna," she said, as she rose from behind the tea-tray, brushing off the crumbs with her fat hands from her brown silk dress. "I must give her a bit of my mind, and all the good people of the village. It is a pity of the young fellow! To be ruined by a pack of women for a couple of whims."

So she had the close cab from the stables, with the two meagre horses and the coachman who was

never drunk before three in the afternoon, and she drove round to fetch Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk to accompany her. Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk lived over a tiny shop full of baskets and brushes at the far end of the "Straight New Canal," which is called so because it twists in and out, and is three hundred years old at the least.

The New Canal, like most of the canals of the good old town of Overstad, sleeps the sleep of dignified repose. Its sluggish waters dribble lazily round the doors of the cellars down below. You can hang over the iron railings and wonder whether they move. High up above them runs the street—no, the word is of all others most unsuitable—lies the street, on both sides of the deep-sunk line of gloomy water, a rough roadway of boulders between two neat stripes of little bricks. The trees that border it are green and leafy; the grass that creeps across it is also green and fresh. The tall houses, that rise up in straggling rows, nod quietly to each other. They are many storied; the canal is narrow; the sky is grey. If they bent forward a little further, perhaps they might prop each other. There would be nobody to see them do it, for all the inhabitants of the place are fast asleep. Not so; you would be much mistaken if you jumped to that conclusion. They are wide-awake, every mother's daughter of them, sitting well out of sight, behind their little "spy"

mirrors, watching—like very spiders—for a passing “fly” to creep into them. But the polished glasses only reflect the deserted street. Very rarely does cab or carriage rattle down it, making a terrible hubbub on the stones. Foot passengers there are, of course, at intervals, who slink along the sombre house-fronts, with seemingly aimless tread. Never, in that drowsy nook, forgotten of the nineteenth century, does a man go by who looks as if he had anything to do, or would be anxious to do it, if he had. In the early morning there will come a slight rustle in the stillness, because the milkman and the baker and the butcher go leisurely down the long line and climb up the tall “stoops” and ring peals that frighten the solemn somnolence of the neighbourhood, but that is only a ripple on its repose. At spring time, also, the trees burst into life, and spread forth a splendour of cool bright verdure, and the birds will come and twitter modestly under the leaves. They would not dare to sing. And, all the year round, the front doors are green, and the muslin curtains hang white and neat as in a doll’s house, and the brass bell-handles sparkle like diamonds, and the grey stone stoops are polished till you could eat off them without disgust. And sometimes, on rare occasions, a ragged street-boy, lost out of the life of to-day, will come tearing down the middle of the road, across the grass-grown boulders, hoarsely shriek-

ing "Extra telegrams!" "Latest foreign news!" But nobody ever buys of him. Not on this canal.

As Mevrouw Barsselius's conveyance rumbled out of a street, through which it could barely squeeze its way (but which, nevertheless, was intersected by tram-rails), a little boy in wooden shoes, who had been standing as if on the look-out, a few houses up the canal, turned round and scuttled eagerly over the stones, crying, "Here she is!" as fast as he ran. The part in which Juffrouw Vonk lived was the poorer one, and just at this point there is a cluster of small dwellings and shops, which breaks the line of statelier houses. A number of faces came hurrying to the doors, chiefly belonging to old women with amazing frilled caps and children in long and numerous petticoats. "Here she is!" called out the old women to each other; and the little children cried, "Hurrah!" without knowing why.

Mevrouw Barsselius looked out of the carriage-window in amazement, her great purple face fringed round by the most old-fashioned of coal-scuttle bonnets, which she devoutly believed to be not only in exact keeping with her style of beauty, but highly fashionable as well. Meijuffrouw Vonk had only lately come to live in this neighbourhood, having quarrelled with her last landlady about the length of a candle, which she asserted to have grown mysteriously less. Her benefactress had not yet condescended to visit

her in her new abode, and therefore, now, having called to the coachman, that lady appealed to the little knot of women to learn the exact place of residence of Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk. A cry went up which almost frightened the widow, and a couple of little boys, whose feelings became too exuberant for them, turned somersaults into anybody's lap. "That's it!" "Here she is!" "Hurry up, ma'am!" cried the crowd, which was momentarily increasing. It is amazing to watch what a number of little children and old women a couple of cottages can vomit forth at a stretch. "Come along!" cried one venerable hag, with her skinny hand on the carriage-door. "You shouldn't have been so late, ma'am. I've had fourteen myself, and I know how it feels when the nurse comes late." "No, indeed, juffrouw," cried another woman from her doorstep, where she was scratching the shock head of a dear little five-year-old. "It's a shame, and I was telling Mejuffrouw Vonk so, for you to let the poor creature lie without help."

Be it known to him who may not understand these allusions, that an interesting event had taken place that very morning in the family with whom dwelt Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk. It was she who—always fond of interfering everywhere—had recommended a special friend of hers as nurse. And this nurse, to the indignation of the neighbourhood, had

not yet arrived. She had been sent for last evening in a violent hurry, and poor Adelaida was much distressed by her failing to appear.

"Here she is!" cried the children. There must have been more than a dozen of them. Wherever did they all come from? They skipped and hooted round the bewildered Barsselius, as a couple of eager arms helped that old lady out and on to the pavement. She was set down, struggling and puffing, and wondering what it was all about. And Bijou, who hated all common people with canine conceit, stood up, with his slender paws on the ledge of the carriage-window, and gave vent to his indignation in a series of uninterrupted yelps.

"But what is it?" gasped the widow. "In fact, I did not want to get out. Where is Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk? I came to see Mejuffrouw Vonk!"

"Here," cried the old beldame who was drawing her along, "this way! Come along! You'll see quite enough of her, and a first-rate scolding you'll get. Come along, ma'am! Whatever did you bring that dog with you for?"

And the children, grouped round the narrow doorway through which the fat widow had been propelled, sang in chorus, "I came to see Mejuffrouw Vonk! Mejuffrouw Vonk! Mejuffrouw Vonk!"

Spluttering and protesting, but forgetting in her agitation and the energy of her resistance to say

what was really her style and quality, not understanding even, in the heat of her anger, that she was being mistaken for some other person, the indignant widow was propelled up a short staircase and into a dark back-room, already occupied by several people. "Here she is!" called out her guide, with exultation. "I've showed her the way, and I tell her it's a shame to be behind time, and I a mother of fourteen that can know!" "Yes, indeed," said a young man, evidently a medical student, or young doctor, turning angrily from the dim light of the shaded window, "and I really must say, mejuffrouw, that you seem to be very ill-fitted for your business, if you can't even get up in the night." "I am sorry," fell in Adelaida's majestic tones, "that I ever recommended you to any one, and I should certainly not have done so, you worthless creature, if I had had any idea you would repay me with incapacity and ingratitude!" All these reproaches followed each other so rapidly, that not a word of explanation could be squeezed in between them, and the darkness of the sick-room made it impossible to distinguish the speakers.

The sufferer, hid away in the bedstead, sighed faintly, and a querulous little cry, tremulous but persistent, quivered forth from somewhere among a group of bustling females.

The sound of Adelaida's well-known voice re-

called Mevrouw Barsselius's presence of mind as if by magic.

"How dare you?" she gasped—for her breath was well-nigh gone. "Adelaida, you insolent creature! how can you venture to speak to me like that? This is the worst morning's work you ever did in your life, I can assure you, and a woman with my money——"

"Peace!" said the doctor authoritatively; "hold your tongue and do your work, or leave the room!"

"Anna Maria!" cried Mejuffer Adelaida, and burst into tears.

"Oh, don't make such a noise, please," groaned the feeble voice from the bed. An angry flutter of protest arose among the ladies in attendance on the baby, and the doctor, incontinently catching the fat widow by the shoulders, pitched her out on to the landing and locked the door.

"Oh, let me go to her, I entreat you! I must speak to my poor Anna Maria!" wailed Adelaida's voice from the inside. The door was once again opened, and a second female figure—gaunt, this time, and long—was projected into the little hall. The exit was effected with unexpected, and perhaps with unnecessary, rapidity, and Mejuffrouw Adelaida, shooting down on the widow's ample rotundity, like a knife into a dumpling, cut right through some of the softest parts of that lady's physical and psychical

sensitiveness. The doctor, as he rebolted the door, swore a naughty swear about women in general.

Anna Maria sat down violently on the square of uncarpeted landing, and Adelaida, stumbling forward in the effort to regain her equilibrium, gave her benefactress's poke bonnet an ungentle push in passing. From the street could be heard Bijou's untiring protestations.

"Forgiveness!" sobbed Adelaida, as she fell up against the balusters.

"Never!" said Anna Maria, rubbing her head.

"I took you for the nurse!" implored Adelaida.

"The repetition of the insult can only augment it," answered Anna Maria.

"But the darkness of the room and the agitation of the moment;" entreated Adelaida.

"Oh, anything can excuse the behaviour of an idiot," snapped Anna Maria. "Perhaps you might help me up, if you are not too stupid to do it. I don't know how I shall ever get downstairs again. I should not wonder if the coming up were to cost me my life, so it isn't of much account any way." Upon which she allowed herself to be tenderly hoisted up and gently lifted down to the carriage. Mejuffrouw Adelaida's angular face was the colour of a mulberry by the time she had got the widow back into Bijou's obstreperous embraces. Two little boys, who still lingered, waiting for anything that might come,

watched with dignified interest as the fluffy ball of excitement bounded all over his recovered mistress's person, licking her face wherever he could get at it. "The one creature in the world who shows me unalterable affection!" sobbed the widow. "I would not insult him, Adelaida, by saying that you have the heart of a beast."

"May I accompany you?" petitioned the spinster very humbly, making herself as small as she could by the carriage door. "Perhaps I might be of service to you, Anna Maria, and afford you some necessary assistance, in spite of your already having the help of Bijou." She could not keep back this modest little sneer. The widow was still too agitated to notice it.

"Oh, come if you like," she whined. "I drove round on purpose to fetch you, but I little knew what I was preparing for myself. Only let us get away out of this horrid, low neighbourhood. I don't see why you can't live in respectable quarters with the help I afford you. And the Straight Canal is too good for you, of course, at the upper end. But I can't stay for your bonnet. I feel very unwell. I must go home."

They drove off together in the direction of Mevrouw Barsselius's house, the widow still gasping, protesting, and spluttering generally. As she gradually smoothed down some of her worst-ruffled feathers,

she began to realise that, having ordered the carriage, and being prepared for the journey, she might as well satisfy her curiosity with regard to the situation of affairs at Wyk. And she felt that she could not secure a better opportunity for venting all her indignation on Adelaida, than by boxing up that unfortunate spinster with herself during a two hours' drive.

"The air will do me good," she said, as she bade Mejuffrouw Vonk let down the farther glass a couple of inches. "Oh no, we cannot go back for your bonnet. You will either drive without it to Wyk, or you will walk home as you are. I dare say they're not accustomed to bonnets in that neighbourhood, and probably nobody would mind."

She started the theory that Adelaida had got up the whole scene she had just passed through on purpose to insult her, and she clung the more tenaciously to her assertion the less she found herself able to defend it. At last, in the heat of the argument, she did not hesitate to answer "Yes" to Adelaida's indignant question, whether she thought the baby had been born exclusively on that account.

"Produce your nurse!" she cried triumphantly, as if thereby clinching the argument. "Only produce her! You know you can't. You haven't got a nurse to produce. - Yah!"

"Not in my pocket, no," replied Adelaida; "but if you will come to the house to-morrow——"

"*I* return to the filthy hole!" snorted the Barselius, "at a second risk of catching the measles, if I haven't caught them already! You are too good, Adelaida, you are really too painfully kind. No, thank you; I have had quite enough of visits to hovels, to—to dustbins, pigsties, dunghills—yes, dunghills. You must really excuse me, Adelaida."

"Do you mean to insinuate," queried Mejuffrouw Vonk, who had come to the end of a naturally short temper, which was only artificially—and, it must be confessed, inordinately—lengthened out by considerations of her legacy—"do you mean to insinuate, Anna Maria, that I am comparable to one of those useful, but unpleasing domestic animals for whose accommodation the buildings you mention are erected; or, otherwise, that I might be alluded to as one of those articles, which, however necessary they may once have been, are now considered unserviceable and are therefore cast forth and carted away?"

"Oh, rubbish!" retorted the widow, "don't make fine speeches to me. You're like my so-called nephew, only the young scapegrace is no nephew of mine. No, Adelaida, you're a very worthy woman, and I won't deny it. But you must excuse my repeating that you are an idiot. Too great an idiot to be trusted with money. And after the cruel treat-

ment I have received at your hands this morning, I shall certainly alter my will. I speak frankly on the matter, as you know. And I shan't leave you the egg-boiler, for you won't have any eggs to boil. Not that any mortal could boil anything with the rubbishy concern."

With such animated intercourse did the ladies while away the long carriage drive. Miss Vonk knew that the best means of regaining favour would be to allow the widow to let off all possible steam, and she ultimately found herself rewarded for a large expenditure of forbearance by the long postponed offer of a biscuit from her protectress's bag. She took it humbly, and ate it thankfully. It is all very well to be proud and to have your feelings, but she had not partaken of a too substantial breakfast, poor thing! and there is a certain feeling in the region of the stomach which is apt to thrust all others on one side. She was munching her second biscuit, as they drew up at Miss Varelkamp's door.

Betje ran out to receive them. "You're too late, mevrouw," she cried, her face full of importance. "The juffrouw drove off to the station exactly half an hour ago!"

The Barsselius thrust her head out of the carriage-window. She could just squeeze her bonnet through. "The station?" she cried. "Where to?"

What? Where has she gone to?" Bijou sat up and recommenced barking. At Betje this time.

"I don't know rightly," answered Betje. "It's to foreign parts. She said I must wait quietly till I heard from her. Juffrouw Dorothy knows. It's all Juffrouw Dorothy nowadays. But I believe she has written to you."

"Gone away!" Mevrouw Barsselius burst out into a violent passion. "Running after Arnout, no doubt! Disgusting! And to think that I should have been in time to stop her, if it hadn't been for your barbarous cruelty, Adelaida! I shall never forgive you! Never! The woman will ruin herself and him, and the blame will be yours! It will follow you to your grave. And whether you live long or short, you will live and die a pauper! So much for your baby, and your nurse, and all your wicked spite!"

At which Adelaida, worn out by so much labour laboured in vain, began to cry.

While the Widow Barsselius was driving towards Wyk, Suzanna, having set all things in order and made such simple preparations as were necessary, was preparing to depart on her hazardous journey into the immeasurable, the unknowable, the great vague terror, which lay beyond her little world of honest Dutchdom. She knew nothing of foreign regions, as we have seen, than that wickedness was rife there—the wickedness of violence and the wicked-

ness of fraud. But so much she knew, that all abominations of bloodshed and of obscenity centred in that beautiful city, the Babylon of modern civilisation, the fountain of revolutions, the mother of things—and beings—illegitimate. This she knew; and even her stout heart trembled at thought of the dangers she was about to face. She had courage enough, in her way, as we have seen, to fit out a small regiment, but she did not agree with Madame de Mongelas that danger was a beautiful thing. As long as she could she avoided it. And the idea of travelling alone into what would probably prove to be a forest full of lions was inexpressibly dreadful to her.

She looked out from the fly, as she drove off, watching the little cottage grow less a-down the lane. Presently it was but a speck in the distance, with a still far smaller speck in front of it. Then the juffrouw could no longer see Betje, who stood uselessly waving her apron, the tears coursing down her hard cheeks, as if they wanted to mark them in white. Then the cab turned a corner, and even the cottage was gone.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp tried the lock of her flowery carpet-bag, and felt—it was the third time—for her keys. Then she placed one hand on her modest store of money, which was sewed up in a bag she wore next to her chest. Then she looked

at her watch, and as she still had half an hour to spare, and the station was ten minutes distant, she told herself she would be late.

She had said to Dorothy that she wished to go unattended to the train. And, in truth, Dorothy would have found it very difficult to accompany her. She was busy making preparations for the departure of the family from Steenevest. They were to return definitely to Amsterdam in a few days. Karel had sailed for Java, without a word of further explanation or repentance. Cornélie was engaged to a young carpenter from a not too distant village (with a thousand florins to her dowry): in one word, that whole little business had been brought to a most satisfactory and correct termination. There was a little complication you know, of the customary sort, or there need have been no compensation at all. Mynheer van Donselaar behaved with great wisdom and generosity—with very great generosity indeed.

“What!” cries Common Sense, “would you have the respectability of the family violated, the refinement of the marriage-tie destroyed? Would you tell me that wedlock is nothing but——” Hush! I would lay down none of these laws. I, who tell you the story of Suzanna Varelkamp, I am an impartial chronicler, or fain would strive to be so. I tell you what *she*—an erring, loving woman—thought and did. Be it for you to choose your own right and

wrong, if only you are as honest as she was. I believe that Mynheer van Donselaar was honest, according to his lights, but he was not as particular about his lights as he might have been. Most of us, adrift on the ocean, are too eager in our look-out for harbour lights, and we strike against the rocks of the wreckers, because the shortest and easiest way out of difficulties tempts us on to our ruin. Let us, then, not be too hard on those who are not content with the simplest solution, but fancy that the most arduous must be the right one because of its peril and its sacrifice. At least they aspire unto something better, purer, holier than themselves. And God have mercy on those who have forgotten to do that; or, who, remembering, deny it.

The first object Suzanna noticed as she drove up to the little shed which did duty for a station was the lanky figure of Dominus Jakob te Bakel, standing well out in front of it, gazing down the road.

"I told you not to come, Jakob," she said reprovingly, as he helped her to alight. She was disconcerted by his presence; she was too unhappy to want anybody's sympathy.

"And I disobeyed you, Tante Suze. I will never do it again. Only this once."

He helped her with her ticket and her luggage—not an easy affair. She could only get her things booked for Utrecht *viâ* Overstad; and from that

junction she would have to take a fresh ticket for Paris.

"So you see, Jakob," she said, not very graciously, "it was hardly any use your coming, after all."

"No," he answered quietly; "you ought to have assistance at Utrecht. However will you manage to travel alone?"

"God will help me," said the murderess. She meant it too, every word of it. But her lips trembled with agitation nevertheless.

"There are lions, you know, and tigers," continued Jakob, "that meet you in the road. In fact, they are to be seen in the most frequented parts of the city."

"That is dreadful," said Suzanna. She did not think he meant what he said; but she did not know what he meant, and she was sure it must be dreadful.

"It is," continued Jakob imperturbably. "But the most terrible of all is, when you see one of these lions driving a pair of horses in front of him, and the tiger, perhaps, sitting up behind."

After a moment, during which he enjoyed the not uncommon experience of seeing his joke fall dead, without an answering ripple on Suzanna's face, he added—

"Here comes your train. I shall find a carriage for you, and then we must separate for a time. Not smoking, I suppose?"

"Third-class," said Suzanna steadily. "Farther down."

He obeyed her. "But you can't travel third-class in France," he said. "No trains; and what there is, I have been told, unfit to be used."

"I shall do it as long as I can," said Suzanna; "and, as for unfitness, all foreigners are dirty, and smell of garlic."

"Who has been telling you that all foreigners smell of garlic, Tante Suze? How many foreigners have you ever seen? Have you ever spoken to one except Madame de Mongelas?"

"Never mind," said Suzanna, ruffled. "No; in fact, I have never spoken to any, except to one or two governesses, but I have heard a French minister preach. He was a good man. I suppose it was very foolish of me, but I remember being much surprised to think he should be so good a man—and yet French. Put my bag on the seat, please, not up in the net. And now, Jakob, good-bye!"

Jakob vanished, as he was bid.

At Utrecht, as she got out, hot and flurried among the bustle of large traffic and small accommodation, the first thing she saw was Jakob te Bakel standing on the platform, evidently waiting to offer his help.

"Jakob," she said almost angrily, "what is the

meaning of this—this well-meant, kindly folly? I told you to stay in Wyk.”

“But I disobeyed you, Tante Suze! I will never do it again. Only this once.”

He got her well through the worry and confusion of fresh registration. She had only one small box and her carpet-bag. But one box, in travelling, requires almost as much care as twelve. Remember that, dear ladies, when paterfamilias complains of your luggage. And make him take the maximum number. For we like to see you tastefully dressed.

At the frontier station a new ordeal awaited Suzanna in the shape of the custom-house formalities. How would she get through them? The question had been worrying her for the last hour.

“Let me help you with the carpet-bag,” said a voice at her side—Jakob te Bakel.

“You are going with me, Jakob!” she said, altogether disconcerted. “How can you do it? You know I forbid you to do it.”

“I disobeyed you for this once,” said Jakob as coolly as ever. “I shall never do it again, Tante Suze!”

“But you say that each time,” persisted Suzanna.

“Oh no—excuse me; the disobediences all flow together and are one. They are my *finale*, you understand.”

He opened her bag for her, and locked it again. Then he led her to her compartment, and, standing with one foot on the step, he said—

“Is there any necessity, now that I am travelling by the same train, for our occupying separate carriages? Or do you grant me permission to come into yours?”

And so, after an uneventful journey—uneventful to Suzanna except for the fact that now, abroad, even the common people all spoke French—they steamed into the Gare du Nord.

Then came that succession of what look like meaningless annoyances which makes travelling hideous through the garden of Europe. For no man in all creation has such talent for unprofitable discomfort as the French railway director—unless it be the French State official. What would Suzanna have done? It may well be asked again.

As they at last drove out of the station, after a couple of hours delay, in their neat little yellow-glazed cab, Suzanna pressed te Bakel's hand. “I am glad you came with me,” she said.

That was all the reward he got for a sacrifice which would cost him so much. He had just received a definite sum from a lady who had intended it to be spent in the purchase of books. It had come in the nick of time, for it had put an end to

his indecision about going—the “oracle of the Bible” having proved inadequate this time.

It was all he got. But he knew Tante Suze. And, knowing her, he knew it to be more than enough.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE IN AUTEUIL.

A TALL, quiet house in rural Paris—for there is a rural Paris still—a Paris which is half tramway and races and chemin de fer de ceinture, and half village-street and pump and provincials—a Paris of trim villas with flower-decked gardens and contented old rentiers, and of odd little all-round shops, where you can buy cheap toys and sweets as well as vegetables and newspapers—the Paris that lies beyond Passy: Auteuil and Boulogne sur Seine (which, by the way, is no longer Paris) and Billancourt.

A many-storied house, then, in Auteuil, down a quiet sunny street, where the blue-frocked children play freely in the gutter, and the concierges bring out their chairs on to the pavement and chatter over their needlework. The inevitable café at the corner (“de la République et de Versailles”), with its smell of absinthe and the inevitable sergent de ville in front of it, in his cape and képi. A broad white road and white pavements, a strip of garden with green railings and red roses, white walls with narrow

scarlet-curtained windows—and the warmth and the light and the nameless coquetry of Paris over it all. Inside, discomfort and cheap finery, tarnished gilding and faded red satin, wax-flowers under glass-cases, a crystal chandelier done up in yellow gauze. The Paris which the Parisian sees twice or thrice in a lifetime, 12, Rue de la Prairie aux Primevères.

A concierge appeared out of her underground den when Suzanna's cab stopped at the door, one of those viragos whom Paris loves to produce, a woman of immense bulk, with a black moustache, bright black eyes, and untidy hair. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the place was as yet only half awake. Suzanna had found it impossible to delay any longer in the humble hostelry in which she had passed the night, and she had therefore started early on the long drive out to Auteuil. Jakob accompanied her. But he was to wait for her outside. On this she had insisted. She must see the Frenchwoman's husband alone.

"Monsieur le Vicomte de Mongelas, does he live here?" asked Jakob, politely lifting his hat to the virago.

"Fourth storey, second door to the left, opposite the glass gallery," said that lady in one breath and a gruff voice.

Jakob was fain to ask for a repetition of the longest word he had ever heard in his life, and,

under many snorts and scowls of protest from the Cerberus at the Gate, it gradually fell into its component parts, and he understood that Suzanna must mount four flights of stairs to her destination.

"Well," he said, laughing, "it's a good thing you are not Mevrouw Barsselius, Tante Suze."

"As if I minded stairs, Jakob," retorted Juffrouw Varelkamp nervously, "or anything else. If I can get him to do what I want for me, it will seem like a ladder that mounts into heaven."

"Into heaven?" repeated Jakob incredulously.

"Yes," she answered hurriedly, "the only heaven that is left me—the heaven of doing right. Will you ask her to show me the way?"

"Oh, but no," said the lady of the gate indignantly, when this request was made patent to her. "I am there, monsieur, to furnish indications, but I am not an ascenseur. The vicomte is at home, you cannot mistake him; but I doubt that he will be visible at this hour. You can inquire."

"Thank you, madame," muttered Jakob in Dutch, as he helped Miss Suzanna to alight, "and it seems to me that if they could have supplied your head to Cerberus, they need hardly have added two more."

"Ces Anglais!" grunted the concierge to herself, as she crept back. She was right, after all; you could not expect her to act as parlour-maid to the numerous inhabitants of the house. But of French

customs, and especially of French politeness—which is polite, exquisitely polite, except in its official capacity—Suzanna and her travelling companion knew as much as you and I of Timbuctoo.

So Suzanna climbed upstairs alone; and on the fourth storey she found a door, as indicated, on which was fastened a large visiting card—The Vicomte de Mongelas, Officer of the Legion of Honour; Ex-captain of the Fourteenth Chasseurs d'Afrique, and, in the corner, the address of a café, on the Boulevards.

Suzanna knocked. No answer. She knocked again. Nothing but the silence, the beat of her own heart, and a drowsy voice, somewhere at the back of the building, droning, "En revenant de la Revue."

A few more appeals remained unanswered. The voice in the distance went on unconcernedly singing. Suzanna crept downstairs again.

"Well?" said Jakob te Bakel, waiting in the cab.

"There is nobody there," answered Suzanna faintly. "Hunt up the woman and make her say something, Jakob, please."

The concierge proved indignant. Could she help it if rentiers lay longer in their beds than people who had to work for their living, like her? The vicomte had been to the theatre last night. He had come home by the last train, as he almost always did. She had pulled the "cordon" for him at half-

past twelve. He was an old man. He must have his rest. And nobody ever came to see him. What did madame want?

This last question aroused her curiosity, in the very act of putting it. She wanted to follow it up, but Suzanna was not going to answer. She stood in the middle of the strip of garden, uncertain what to do next.

"Go for an hour's drive in the Bois de Boulogne, round the corner, and come back again," suggested the concierge, who, seeing nothing could be extracted from the strangers was anxious to get rid of them.

"No," said Suzanna to Jakob, "that would be unnecessary expense. And there has been no unnecessary expense except the franc for that pillow you would have me take at Tergnier. I could have rested just as well without it."

The cabman was sulky. He stood reading his "Intransigent," and eyeing them from time to time with malevolent eyes. He had reason to be angry with foreigners who took him off the stand for a drive to Auteuil—the *ultima Thule* of Parisian cabmen—and who studied the tariff the greater part of the way.

Suzanna dismissed him, paying but a small additional fee, and thereby rousing all the latent vehemence of his jehu-nature. "Abuse me as much as

you like," she said; "I don't understand you," and she sat down on a bench under a spreading chestnut tree by the side of the broad pavement, and took out her knitting. Said Jakob to the coachman as he followed her, "Pas faire, pas bon." "Go to the devil!" growled number 17,317, as he drew the cloth off his horse's back. He fired a retiring volley of cabby-amenities at them over the roof of his vehicle as he rattled off.

And then the broad, sun-lit street grew very quiet under its row of majestic trees. Suzanna, on her bench, casting anxious glances from time to time at the windows of the fourth storey opposite her, prepared for the coming struggle. What should she say to the man—this gentleman, this foreigner! How could she ask of him what she desired to ask—divorce! Yet she must ask it. There was no other way.

"Jakob," she remarked presently, "I sometimes, when I feel how powerless we are, comprehend how useless it is. Do you understand me?"

"Not exactly," said Jakob.

"No; I do not perhaps clearly understand myself. But I mean that it is no good trying. All our right is wrong, and so often our wrong is right. Sometimes one thinks it does not matter, because, after all, we can do nothing. But we want to do; there is

the mystery. Jakob—tell me, tell me—don't you think I love God?"

"Tante Suze!" cried the young minister in much distress.

"Yes, I know. But what is the use? He has deserted me. I—I am all alone. And ever since—through the last weeks—I have been telling myself that I did very wrong—very wrong towards Madame de Mongelas. But it is only the brain says it, not the heart. And the brain rejoices to say how very, very wrong it was, because then it can find the easier excuses. And, indeed, how could I help it? I must save him, by fair means or foul! There was only one way, and I tried it. We must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and we are powerless to do it—oh, my God, we are powerless! Powerless!" She bent over her knitting till he could not see her face.

There was silence between them—the passionate old woman and the pure young priest. High up in a neighbouring tree a singing-bird broke into sudden little bursts of song.

"I am only a quiet old Dutchwoman," resumed Suzanna after a time; "but it seems to me, the more I wonder over it, that there is no escape for a mind that thinks but idiocy or—madness."

"Or faith?" whispered the Domine.

"Faith, which is idiocy," gasped Suzanna, "or

madness, which is doubt. What am I to believe—you, who wear a white tie and know? Am I to believe that it was God's will that Arnout should be ruined, body and soul, by this strumpet? That, to me, is idiocy. Or am I to believe that He wished me to save the boy by killing her? That, to me, is madness; for I failed. Am I to rejoice that I failed, when my failure means the boy's perdition? Should I have rejoiced, had I succeeded, when murder meant his deliverance? What do we know? What must we do? Must all the world go wrong because we may not be our own avengers? Must evil triumph because it were wrong to arrest it? To work out our salvation! And we are powerless to do it. Powerless! Oh, my God! my God!"

Again there was a moment's silence. What was Jakob, to intrude his little moralising on such an agony as this?

"Let us have no fine phrases," she said hastily, as if putting them away from her. "I am a religious woman, as you know. Oh, of course, very religious. We grow up in our little creeds, and are very contented with them, till the moment comes to choose. And then we are at a loss. And we stumble forward; and we fall. There is nothing about my case in the Catechism; and the Catechism is the whole of religion. I have always been taught that."

"Then you have been taught wrong," cried the

clergyman, breaking through his reserve at this challenge, and striking out straight from the shoulder. "And you know it, Tante Suze. Religion is the secret of our heart with God."

"Ah, Jakob," said Suzanna, smiling sadly, "you say that because you are not orthodox. But I cannot unlearn the old teaching that was good enough when I was a girl."

"Tante Suze," said Jakob, seeking in vain to steady his voice, "there is a school in which we learn with terrible rapidity. It is the school of adversity. Perhaps God is teaching you in that."

"If so, I understand nothing of the lesson," said Suzanna gruffly.

"Perhaps it is like a diagram on the blackboard, all confusion till the last touch makes it plain."

"I will go back again now," said Suzanna, rolling up her knitting. She rose from her seat. As she passed by the young Dominé, she laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. "You are very good to me, Jakob," she said, "and I thank you. But I am too wicked for a good man's help. I must fight out my fight alone."

This time Suzanna's ring was answered with unexpected celerity. Barely had she touched the bell when the door was thrown wide open, and on the threshold there appeared an old gentleman attired in

a dingy dressing-gown, which had once been all crimson-petalled flowers. The aforesaid garment was thrown back from a collarless shirt, and on the old gentleman's head was a nightcap with a hole in it.

"You are late again, Alphonse," began the old gentleman. Then he cried "Ciel!" and banged to the door.

But Suzanna was too quick for him, and adroitly inserted her sunshade.

"Remove that umbrella, madame," said a grave voice from the other side of the door. "There is some error. It is not to me that you destine the honour of your visit."

"I must see the Vicomte de Mongelas, monsieur," Suzanna cried back through the narrow opening, driving down her sturdy parasol. "I have come on purpose from abroad; and my visit is of the greatest importance."

The old gentleman's hold on the door slightly relaxed, but he still kept it almost closed. "It is a foreigner," he said to himself, "and therefore probably not a dun. It is I, madame," he said aloud, "the Vicomte de Mongelas; but then, see here my dilemma. I am not installed for the visits of ladies. And my toilet—forgive me the allusion"—he pushed the door hard up against the parasol—"is not yet completed. I cannot admit you, and I cannot request you to wait on the landing. What am I to do?"

"I will wait on the landing," said Juffrouw Varelkamp, "till you are ready to receive me."

"But it is impossible." He remained for a moment in thought. Suzanna clung to her parasol. "There is no other way," he said at last. "You are certain that you are desirous to speak to me?"

"I cannot go until I have done so," said Suzanna.

"Madame, I would not think of requesting you to. Then I propose to you that I let go the door, on condition of your solemnly promising me not to stir from your place till you hear another door close in the passage. Then you will walk in——"

"And wait in the hall," interrupted Suzanna. "Yes, I promise."

"*Fi donc*, no, madame. I will leave open the entrance to the humblest of sitting-rooms; and you will, perhaps, have the extreme kindness to wait for me there."

"I promise," repeated Suzanna.

"But, pardon," said the vicomte nervously, "you ladies are sometimes so charmingly playful. Is it a man's promise or a woman's?"

"It is a woman's," answered Suzanna dauntlessly; "but a Protestant woman's. I will keep it."

The religious distinction was entirely lost on the old vicomte, who knew nothing of Protestants except that they were people who said they had no sins to confess, but whom you never came across. He

hesitated for a moment, then he came to the conclusion that he could risk it, and made a false dart down the passage to see what Suzanna would do.

Suzanna stood motionless outside, without moving her parasol.

Then the vicomte, reassured, fled back to his bedroom, and Suzanna, having heard the click of his door, walked slowly across a narrow passage into the dirty little salon.

The room was poor and neglected, full of tawdriness and dust. Suzanna looked round her, at the faded square of carpet on the unpolished floor, at the red window-curtains, and at a few good engravings on the wall—of Napoleon the Third and his wife, and one or two Bonapartist generals, and also a couple of beauties of more doubtful rank. And there, on the table, in the middle of the room, stood a large platinogravure photo in a handsome frame, evidently new, of the terrible woman who had destroyed Juffrouw Varelkamp's peace. No need for her to ask whether she had reached her destination. She sank down on a chair against the wall, and waited; but she could not wait long in sight of all that untidiness. She took out a spotless pocket-handkerchief, and began timidly to dust the picture of the woman she hated.

The vicomte, in the mean time, was sitting on

his bed in the adjoining room, nursing a lean but shapely leg. His first thought had been, "Has she seen the hole in my nightcap?" He is waiting for an answer to that question still, and he would dearly like to receive one.

Suzanna had seen it. If she had fallen out of an eighth-storey window, she would have seen all the darns in all the curtains all the way down.

But this doubt was not the most pressing of the Vicomte's difficulties. The question which required more immediate decision was this one: How am I to appear before any woman, be she ever so old or ugly, now that iniquitous barber has again forgotten to come and shave me in time? First he said, "I cannot do it; I would rather die." And then he said, "It is suicide, but I must."

He dressed himself with his usual scrupulous care. His public garments were always unexceptionable. He put on his frock-coat with the red ribbon in the button-hole, for he detested all oddity in dress, and the absence of the "distinction" would have singled him out among his countrymen. And then he looked at himself once more in the glass and cursed the barber. Called the barber, I mean. He called him in vain. He called him names.

"Which is worse?" he thought, "to keep a woman waiting, or to go to her with unkempt beard?" The vicomte was an old stager, and he

never hesitated in matters of this kind. "To keep her waiting," he said. And then he took a large black silk neckerchief, and he bound it neatly round his lantern jaws, and in a little knot at the top of his bald head. He had glossy silver hair, neatly curled over the ears, and a fine eagle nose and white imperial. He was a fine-looking old man, and he knew it. Ah, how he knew it! He was a love-bacillus, like so many of his race. One twist of his moustache meant death.

"It is disgusting," he said, as he surveyed himself in the glass, "like all illness. But it is better than the disgrace of dirt. I have a terrible toothache. Voilà! The dentist did not make them strong enough."

And so, as it ever is in life, this solemn climax of Suzanna's fate did not want for its "note comique."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VICOMTE'S SCRUPLES.

SUZANNA slipped her handkerchief back into her pocket, and stood up as the vicomte came in.

"Madame," he said, "I am desolated. Accept my regrets. But I am ravaged by the toothache. Yet I could not refuse myself to a lady. Will you do me the extreme honour to sit down?" He handed her a chair as he spoke. And then he winced, on account of the pain he was enduring. "Not a bad face," he said to himself, "not by any means. She must have been pretty some forty years ago. Why the deuce do they ever grow old? And why don't the young ones come to see me?"

"My name," stammered Suzanna, "is Mademoiselle Varelkamp. Here is my card. I come to speak to you about your wife."

"My wife!" The vicomte sank down into a so-called easy-chair, and lifted his neat hands in affected dismay. "Les affaires de la vicomtesse! Ah, mademoiselle, you are at the worst address possible. I am the last person to be informed of the affairs of Madame la Vicomtesse."

"If I am not mistaken," continued Suzanna, gaining courage, "you are the husband, monsieur, of that lady whose portrait I see on the table."

"Her husband? But yes. If you will," said the vicomte, smiling. "As little as possible, however. I presume I am still her husband. You could hardly call me her consort. And I am not responsible for the actions of Madame la Vicomtesse; still less for her bills."

"I come not to speak of her bills," answered Suzanna. "What she has taken from me she can never repay. I do not expect it. Let me tell you what I wish, and why."

"But certainly, madame," said the vicomte politely, "only, I beg of you, sit down. And let me also implore you to be calm. Ahi, my toothache! There cannot possibly be any cause for excitement in anything that concerns the fate of Madame de Mongelas."

"There is only this——" began Suzanna. "But I must warn you to be patient with my French. It is bad, and I have much difficulty in speaking."

"Madame," said the vicomte, "I will not tell you that I had not noticed you were a stranger, for I never insult by flattery; but I will simply tell you that I took you for a foreigner who had always lived in France."

"A liar," thought Suzanna; "a flatterer. Let me take care."

"Monsieur," she said, "your wife, while travelling in Holland, was upset out of a carriage, and brought into my house. She there made the acquaintance of my nephew, a young student of theology, and she ran away with him. They are now in Italy. They—live together. So much, probably, you know."

"I?" said the vicomte with an amused face. "I? My dear lady, I know nothing. How should I? These are not the things that you charming creatures communicate to your liege lords by a '*mot à la poste*.' Et après? Do you want your nephew back? I cannot help you, I assure you. I said so before. Be philosophic, madame, and let him stay till he returns of his own accord."

"I do not want my nephew back," said Suzanna gravely.

"Not? But that is charming. I perfectly well understand you. Nor do I want my wife."

"Monsieur," said Suzanna, colouring all over her pale face, and up into the roots of her gray hair, "your wife is not with you; she is with my nephew. As you say, she is no longer your wife. You say also that you do not wish her to return. Then why retain a connection which can only be galling?"

"Parbleu!" said the vicomte, "it is unavoidable. Madame is there; and that is all. You would not,

I presume, request me to remove by violent means the lady who has done me the honour to share my name? Like the Duc de Praslin, eh?—my august connection. Ah, madame, that is ‘moyen âge.’ These things do themselves no more. Murder has become so common that gentlemen no longer kill.”

Suzanna winced. “I do not mean murder,” she said, trembling so that the parasol shook in her hand; “I mean divorce. Why should you not divorce from your wife?”

In his heart the old vicomte deeply resented the question, which showed an unwarrantable interference in his affairs. But he was too polite to pass beyond merely tacit protests. He smiled again. He had taken to smiling since he had bought his new set of teeth. He forgot the toothache he was supposed to have in doing so.

“Divorce?” he said. “Well, it would be an idea. It is very kind of you to think of it for me. But you forget, madame, that the Church forbids it. I am a good Catholic, and not a follower of that saviour of society, Naquet.”

Suzanna had never heard either of the reintroduction of civil divorce into France by the Loi Naquet, nor of the prohibition of any form of divorce by the Romish Church; so she stared at her interlocutor for further information.

“Madame,” he continued, “remember that the

Church forbids divorce. I could never think of it, therefore, I. The Vicomtes de Mongelas have always gone with the Church."

"It is your religion which forbids you?" queried Suzanna, groping for light.

"But undoubtedly. And yours—if you permit me?—does it advise you to divorce?"

"It forbids you irrevocably?"

"Irrevocably. It is hard; but we have to obey."

Suzanna rose slowly from her chair, stumbling forward, and catching at the table as she did so. "Then I have no more to say," she gasped. "I am sorry I troubled you. I will go."

"Stay, madame," cried the vicomte, interested and curious. "Explain to me, if you will have that graciousness, why this anxiety to rob me of my wife. Is it hate of her? Is it to punish her? Ah, you others, you women, you can hate like—like angels hate vice. Is it because she has carried off the little nephew? If he is a pigeon, she will fleece him. Never mind; the fleeced pigeons fly fastest home."

"It is," said Suzanna, standing by the window and looking down at the portrait, "because I want him to marry her. *My* religion forbids wickedness. He loves her; I would have him legalise his love." This time there was no affectation in the gesture of dismay with which the vicomte threw up his hands.

"Marry her!" he cried. "Is it possible? And

what injury has your nephew done to you, that you covet for him the succession to the hand of the Vicomtesse de Mongelas?"

"I love him more than anything on earth," said Suzanna quietly, "and I am working for his good."

"Madame," retorted the vicomte, "we are speaking in riddles. The matter seems of some importance. Let us understand each other. You are in earnest; is it not so?"

"In dead earnest."

"If I were to die, for instance, there would be a match?"

"Yes," said Suzanna. "But I do not wish you to die. He must expiate, as well as I. Yes, there must be expiation."

"I am, indeed, much obliged to you for your kind consideration. My health is excellent. And now, I take an interest in your nephew who, all unbeknown to me, has usurped my place, and in you also—excuse me—because you are a woman, and unhappy."

Suzanna made a repellent movement.

"Of course, you are insulted by my sympathy. I do not desire to intrude it. But, madame, I regret most sincerely that you should have taken this long journey in vain. I have never refused any woman anything in reason. I do not wish to refuse you.

Allow me, then, to furnish you with some brief information which will cause—not me to refuse, but you to retract your request. Shall it be so?”

He had forgotten his toothache. But he carefully rearranged the black bandage. Suzanna bowed in silent acquiescence.

“When I married Madame de Mongelas, madame, she was a charming young girl of eighteen. She is charming still. She will ever be charming, like Ninon de l’Enclos. She was not my equal in rank, but she surpassed me in fortune. In fact, she was the daughter of an honest wine-dealer of the Quai de—what’s its name? I have really forgotten. It is down there, at the other end, among the wine-vats. No matter; nobody ever goes there. Well, she was his daughter, and she brought her dowry: but she kept it in her own hands, as the bourgeois sometimes arrange matters. It is a vulgar arrangement: no woman of delicate birth would desire it. We lived together very happily for several years. She was charming, as I told you, and—eh bien, I am older—but I was charming too.

“Madame, would you believe that at the end of those years she became jealous of a common little chambermaid? She made scenes. No grande dame would have done that; but there you perceive the wine-seller’s daughter. She wished to drive the poor child away; but I refused to allow her to depart, for

she was a good child, and much attached to me. And one day, when I had gone out after one such unpleasantness, I come back in the evening. I see lights in the drawing-room. I mount. I find my servant half drunk on the sofa, with wine in front of him, and my wife at the piano, singing to him, with flowers in her hair! Ah, mon Dieu, how she looked at me, the little devil! She said nothing but, 'Yes; it is amusing. I agree with you,' and she sailed out of the room. What could I do? I kicked the fellow downstairs that night. It was bravado of hers, but I did not dare to let him go. He would have told far more than the truth all over the city.

"We lived in peace for another week or so—an armed peace. Then, one evening, I took my little chambermaid to one of the smaller theatres to amuse her, for the house was getting dull and my wife treated her badly. We came home; she at half-past ten, I at eleven. My wife was not there. Is it not incredible? She comes back past twelve o'clock with the valet, and she drops his arm in the doorway, in my sight. 'Was it amusing,' she says coolly, 'at the Palais Royal? Antoine and I, we have been to the Folies Dramatiques.' Could I support it? Could flesh and blood? I thrashed the man within an inch of his life that night. And she left the house next morning. All Paris knew the story in the course of twenty-four hours. I was ridiculous.

She had made me so, the vixen. I have never been able to hold my head up since."

"She was guilty?" cried Suzanna eagerly, bending forward in a passion of expectation.

"She was guilty, most certainly. Not, perhaps, as you mean. She was guilty of being—a wine-seller's daughter. Do women behave like that? Are they to account themselves in such matters the equals of men? Emancipation with a vengeance! Ah, there you could see the *petite bourgeoisie*. She was not accustomed to the privileges of a gentleman. In her class, perhaps, these matters are treated differently. And now, madame, I ask you, whoever you may be, would you like child of yours to marry such a devil of a woman as that?"

"She was innocent," gasped Suzanna, and fell back on her sofa. "Poor thing!"

The vicomte did not heed her. The recital of his wrongs, long pent up, and now so easily told to a stranger who would disappear out of his life for ever in a few minutes, had pleasantly excited him. He was still very angry with his wife, but he never had an opportunity of saying so.

"She intentionally insulted her husband, and exposed to public scandal the honourable name she was not worthy to bear," he continued bitterly. "Such a woman would be capable of anything. And to think that she is the last Vicomtesse de Mongelas!"

Madame, as far as I am concerned, I would be only too glad if you could alter her style and title."

"And after that," asked Suzanna, "during the following years—what has she done?"

"Madame, I do not know. She has lived with her father. When that wearied her, she has travelled abroad. She has spent—or is spending—her dowry. I fancy she has not yet spent it all. But after much good she has probably not been. It is not in her character. A woman who deserts her husband is fundamentally bad."

"And a man, sir, who betrays his wife?"

"Ah, madame, what do you mean by betrayal? The cases are too different to brook comparison. A man betrays his wife by desertion, a woman by unfaithfulness. I had always been a most exemplary husband to Madame de Mongelas. But she—ah bah, n'en parlons plus! God forgive her the wrong she did me, and keep all good men out of her clutches! We must marry women, we men, madame, neither angels nor fiends. It doesn't do."

"And you," said Suzanna deliberately, as she again rose to depart, "you who speak thus are the same man who refuses to sue for a divorce on religious scruples. You are like your wife, monsieur, whose conscience does not permit her to eat meat on Fridays, but who devours a human soul whole as a joke."

The vicomte shrugged his shoulders. "Affairs of sentiment will not be discussed, madame," he said; "it is unprofitable. And, besides, I will not deny that I have still a foible for Madame la Vicomtesse. She is a most fascinating woman. I am an old man, and, by running away from me, she has condemned me to a life of discomfort. I would range myself, if she would return to me. But, alas! she has no intention of doing so. This escapade with your nephew is the best proof of that. I must wait for the death of her father, and then we shall see."

"I am glad to have spoken to you," said Suzanna, "but not for such reasons as you think. I leave you with the greater regret that you refuse me all co-operation. Good-bye."

"Madame, the regrets are on my side. Ahi, my toothache! But I cannot do otherwise. To tell you true, among other considerations it is impossible for me to let slip those pecuniary advantages which can still result to me from my union with mademoiselle the wine-seller's daughter."

"Money?" said Suzanna, pausing in the doorway. "How? What?"

"Ah, madame, but you are of a curiosity! Admire, then, my adorable frankness. Money! It is a vile thing. And nowadays, alas! it is a vulgar thing. It used not to be so in the good old time. When I married Mademoiselle Coriot, her father was very

wealthy; he gave her a dowry of a quarter of a million francs, and I was 'galant homme' enough, as I told you before, to allow him to settle it on her. He is less wealthy now, yet I reckon that, when he dies, each of his five children will at least have that sum over again. Madame de Mongelas will, as long as she is married, have need of my assistance in the legal formalities. I have no doubt that she will consent to make an arrangement with me accordingly when the time comes. I am not an utter imbecile. I gave way in the matter of the dowry, when I found the old shopkeeper was obstinate; but we stand on a different footing as regards the inheritance, which I thought would be four times as great, and my pretty viscountess will have to come to terms."

He said all this very calmly, looking thoughtfully at his finger-tips, as he spread them out before him. Then he drummed them faintly on the table. He had his object in making such confidences. He was wondering whether the money side of the question would prove to have any interest for Suzanna. "She is poorly dressed," he said to himself; "but, then, that proves nothing. The quality of the stuff is good. And she may be stingy, like most old women. My aunt De Monceaux was smothered in millions, and she looked like a beggar woman. She got a franc one day from a benevolent old gentleman, as she sat on a bench in the Bois de Boulogne, and

she bought a pair of mittens with it that lasted her three years."

"How much," said Suzanna, still standing in the doorway, "do you expect, sir, that you will be able to extract from your wife?"

She was no longer afraid of him. All her unwilling respect for the fine gentleman had faded away. And the momentous interview, with its mighty stake, had dwindled into a money transaction.

He, on his side, felt sorely tempted to increase the sum he had in his head. Who could tell what opportunity here presented itself of escaping, once for all, from duns and discomfort, and a fourth-storey lodging in Auteuil? But, with his peculiar standard of honour, while he was not unwilling to sell his marriage-tie, he could not, for more than one moment, entertain the idea of extorting money from this woman by false pretences.

"I conclude," he said, "that she ought to let me have half. Yes; the death of old Coriot ought to be worth to me, let us say, a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs."

"And if you had these," asked Suzanna, "you would consent to the divorce?"

"Madame, as I have already repeatedly mentioned," said the vicomte with dignity, "I have religious scruples. They are very serious. They

concern my peace of soul. They should be worth at least twenty-five thousand francs more."

Suzanna paused one moment to do a mental sum. Then she said, "I offer you one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs. I offer you no less and no more. Will you have them? Yes or no?"

The vicomte scanned her face. "*Je ne marchande pas avec les dames*," he said. "I will have them. It is agreed."

"You consent to bring a suit against your wife immediately for divorce? And you bind yourself to assist me, by every means in your power, to effect a marriage between her and my nephew?"

"So be it," said the viscount; "why not? You are an extraordinary woman, madame. You know best, undoubtedly, what you are doing; but, if I were your nephew, I should prefer to have another aunt. The sum, by-the-by, is one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs."

"Write it down," said Suzanna, "on paper."

"But, madame, I have never done business with ladies. Appoint, I pray you, some agent——"

"I will do so," interrupted Suzanna; "but give me your promise on paper before I leave this house."

The vicomte had neither ink nor pens in the room. He never wrote anything there, and the few letters he got were addressed to his café. Suzanna tore a page out of a little pocket-book, and the

old gentleman scribbled a few lines on it with a pencil.

She went on her way, holding the scrap of paper in her clenched hand.

"At last!" cried Jakob, sick with waiting. "How long you have been! What did he say to you? What is the result?"

"I have been successful," said Suzanna. "We can go back to-night."

It was the last thing the Dominé had expected. He had thought merely to humour her in accompanying her on this wildgoose chase, and the conclusion was a great blow to him.

"Is it true?" he cried. "Is the woman really to be divorced, and then married to Arnout? But he will refuse to do it! It is wickedness! Madness!"

"Hush, Jakob! No, they will not refuse. When she is divorced, they will have nothing but each other. And they will marry. You forget that they love each other. And, if they do not, the guilt will be hers, not mine. I must make it possible for them. I can do no more. But I must do that."

"You are one of God's fanatics, Tante Suze," said Jakob moodily, "but you do the devil's work."

Suzanna thought differently; for her whole line of argument took its origin from the idea, as we have seen, that Arnout and his companion were already

man and wife. Arnout had married a woman who was divorced from her husband, and that would have been a sin, had he known it; but he had married her in the honest belief that she was a widow, and to marry a widow was not wrong in itself, however unwise it might be. Suzanna felt convinced, moreover, that when her nephew had first entered upon this connection, it had been in the fervour of a youthful passion, without any prior intention of making it a temporary one. In so far, then, his only error had been the not awaiting a religious or civil sanction of his union—surely a very secondary matter, where moral guilt was concerned. Let him obtain such sanction as quickly as possible, and, whatever may have been the woman's guilt in the matter, his soul might be at rest. Yet even the woman, she now told herself, was right in considering herself already divorced. Only she should have remembered that a divorced woman may not marry again. And yet how many divorced women do it! Is it really forbidden? Suzanna found herself beginning to think more leniently of the Vicomtesse de Mongelas after the story she had heard from the vicomte.

What shall we say of the poor old woman's bitter reasoning, blundering on to the ruin of her own happiness and her nephew's? That it is transcendental, and would lead to mountains of misery which we

practical men avoid? So be it. But when she said that the world would be a better and a purer place, if marriage were not the marriage service, but the marriage-tie, surely we must admit that she spoke the truth. It is impossible? Then, so is Christianity.

And when she did that mental sum before answering the vicomte, Suzanna reckoned out that the sum of one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs represented every penny she possessed in the world.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WOMAN'S RENUNCIATION.

"JACKO," said Madame de Mongelas, lounging before the shaded window, with the full blaze of summer in front of her, "listen to the advice of a woman of the world. Never marry, unless you can do so without falling in love. And never fall in love, unless you can do so without any danger of marrying."

"I do not understand these subtleties," said Jacko. "Are there any more chocolate creams or are there not?"

His eyes said it as plainly as if he had spoken. The vicomtesse understood him, and, opening an exquisite little bonbonnière of Saxony porcelain which

stood at her elbow, she threw a couple of sweets across for him to catch.

"You will be ill again, as you were yesterday," she said. "But, after all, it is your business, not mine—at least, as long as you have the grace to get out on to the balcony in time. Every one must know for himself how much he can stand of the sweets of life. And if we get cloyed, so much the better. There is no man so wretched as he whose appetite outlives his teeth."

"Mine are good," said Jacko, cracking away.

"It seems like yesterday," continued the vicomtesse musingly, "that I put that man on the box of a fiacre and drove to the Folies Dramatiques. I still see myself sitting there in the amphitheatre, and him in the pit. What a fever of indignation I was in! I believe I almost loved M. de Mongelas when my father married me to him. It is a long time ago. And now, this Arnout. What of him? What do you think, Jackanapes, of Monsieur Arnout?"

Jackanapes put his wizened little hand to his heart, as he had been taught to do. The hand held a broken bit of bonbon.

"You cannot get it in that way," said his mistress, sneering bitterly. "Only down your stomach. Heart-love must come from inside. Sweets to the sweet."

Jackanapes blinked his eyes, and followed her advice.

"Oh dear!" she said with a yawn, throwing back her white arms under the luxuriance of her hair, "you are only a monkey, Jacko. It is the last stage of human happiness. Never try to take a step beyond it into the void of originality, for there you are left alone with your despair. As long as you are a monkey, it is all right. *Singe ceux qui t'ont précédé, et ceux qui t'entourent.* It is the only road to happiness. There is no road to happiness. There is nothing but the bit of happiness, in which sit the happy ones who are too stupid to get out."

At this point Jacko took it into his head to institute a search for imaginary fleas.

"Ah, mais non, merci!" cried the vicomtesse. "After all, I would rather be unhappy. There is a misery that grows out of a frenzy of enjoyment such as the happy people never know. Surely," she added, after a moment, "he might have waited a little longer. Life is short; true, I would not deny it. But, none the less, the night is long enough for our dreams to last beyond one brief upheaval of the breast. When they are happy dreams. When they are happy dreams."

There stole such a look of sadness over her beautiful face, that Jacko noticed it. He carefully laid his sugar-plum on one side, and then he crept up to his mistress and began softly stroking her cheek with his hairy little paw.

"Jacko," she said, as she nestled against him, "when it is all over—well over—when the leaf is turned, you and I will remain to each other, and sometimes we will talk it over, and we will tell each other—exactly—how—it—was."

"And so, for the hundredth time, Arnout, the sooner this business is ended, the better." Mr. Doyer-Donselaar struck the ashes from his sempiternal cigar. "It is ridiculous for you to contest my right to decide on the subject. And, really, I am acting for your best. I am your father; I am quite willing to acknowledge you as my son. But you must be guided by me in this matter, if your common sense—for the moment—leaves you in the lurch. Tell the lady that the complication has lasted quite long enough, that you are very sorry, but you are recalled to—to Paris, or, better still—to New York, as you soon will be. Pay her, and be off."

"Pay her!" said Arnout between his clenched teeth.

"Yes. I cannot allow son of mine to remain indebted to any woman under such circumstances. I have put together a reasonable amount in this envelope. Give it her so as to settle the expenses incurred on your journey. Then say good-bye, pack your trunk, and we shall be off to-night." He thrust

the packet into a side-pocket of his son's coat, who appeared to take no notice of it.

"And if I refuse?" asked Arnout.

"If you refuse, I wash my hands of you. It is all very well to have found a son, but not if you must go and sit with him among the swine. I have no inclination that way, I can assure you. I have not recognised you yet, as you are aware, so we are both of us still free. You must know what you do."

"I do know," said Arnout as he walked away.

That morning Mr. Doyer-Donselaar had met Madame de Mongelas on the terrace. He had never addressed her as yet; he ventured to do so now.

"Madame," he said, bowing politely, "that is a charming young man, your brother."

"Yes, monsieur."

"It would be a great pity if anything were to happen to spoil his life. He seems to me to be unhappy, dissatisfied. One would say that he is not his own master, and yet desires to be."

"I do not understand you, monsieur."

"I was only thinking that perhaps you, madame, as his sister, might be able to do something to restore him to that freedom which he undoubtedly covets, and deserves. He will not rest contented long, I am sure. Perhaps it were better to give him

what he wants, before he provokes you by asking for it."

"I know perfectly well how to treat my own brother, monsieur."

"I do not doubt it, Madame la Vicomtesse, but I was only wishing to suggest——"

"There is nothing that you need suggest, monsieur."

"But, surely, I have a right to speak, or I would not have ventured to address you. I am his father, madame."

"His father? Indeed! How interesting. But I have nothing to say to his father."

"Yet, madame, it would seem to me——"

"That is my maid over yonder. Would you have the goodness to call her? I do not like walking alone."

Arnout took Dorothy's letter out of his pocket and read it over again. How often had he not read it already? He knew its few lines by heart. "There is no other way," he said, "and it is the right one. Tante Suze, also is right, I never thought I should have understood how right she is—in spite of all." He went up to Madame de Mongelas. As he came in, the monkey darted forward to greet him.

"He has been peering over the balcony for you at an imminent risk of breaking his neck," said the

viscountess. "You see, he knows we belong together, we three."

"He knows many things," answered Arnout gravely, as he took the little beast on his arm. "He is a wise monkey, and sees far with those restless eyes of his. I wish your life and mine were as simple as Jacko's, Dorine."

"Life is simple enough, Arnout; it is only our passions that complicate it."

"I used to think that life was passion, that there was nothing else, and that all the rest was death. I have thought so for a bright, brief period."

"And now?"

"I do not think so now."

"I pity you, Arnout. That is a dream best left undreamed. But those who once have dreamed it should never awake again."

"And you think," he said, "that now I am awake?"

She looked into his eyes. "Yes," she answered mournfully, "you are awake."

"So much the better. Listen to me, Dorine. You will understand me more easily, if you remember that I am awake. We have been very happy together, have we not? Faugh—la phrase banale! We have been—you know what I would say?"

"Yes," she answered softly, "I know."

"And of late we have sometimes quarrelled, like

foolish children. Why should we quarrel, Dorine? There is no reason why, that I can understand. Can you?"

"Yes," she answered, still in the same subdued voice.

"Yes? How do you mean?"

"I think I understand why we have sometimes quarrelled of late. It does not matter. Go on."

"No, no. I should like to know."

"There is some proverb about new wine and old bottles. I do not know exactly how it is, but I fancy it would prove appropriate."

"Hush, hush! That is from the Bible."

"Is it? I have never read the Bible. Our priests forbid us to."

"Dorine, I want to leave off quarrelling. I want to be as happy as we once were."

"You will never be that, Arnout. Never in the same way twice. Happier I hope you will be, but it will be differently."

"I want to be it in the same way." He got up from his chair and walked to the window, and stood looking out. "Dorine, I want never to leave you. We must always remain together. I want you to marry me. I want you to—to be my wife."

There was a long silence. He did not dare to look round at her, as she lay motionless on her sofa. Jacko, grown suddenly nervous in the suspense,

plucked him by the sleeve. He jerked the little animal away. Would she never speak? At last she spoke.

"That is very kind of you, Arnout," she said, and he fancied that her voice trembled slightly. "More than kind. It is noble. It is worthy of you. It is as I might have expected of one to whom I have given my affection. I thank you for it in this moment. Will you remember in after years—when you are no longer angry with me—that I sincerely thanked you for it? I shall remember—I."

"Angry with you? I am not angry with you," he interposed almost impatiently.

"Yes, you are going to be angry with me soon."

"I shall never be angry with you, dearest. But answer my question. I have waited for an answer long enough."

"An answer? But yes, you shall have an answer," she cried, suddenly changing her tone. "Imagine, Jacko, that it is monsieur who now, in his turn, proposes to me that I should become his wife! First it was our dear aunt, who—not having succeeded in making an angel of me—tried to change me into the next best thing, a Dutch housewife. And now it is you, monsieur! And not you only. From all sides they are bent on effecting my happiness."

"Am I to understand," asked Arnout, "that you reject my offer with contumely?"

"Arnout, I told you I was going to make you angry. Be patient with me. I owe you a confession. I cannot marry you, for I am not a widow, as I told you I was. I am a wife already. Still a wife. My husband is alive."

Suddenly it seemed to Arnout as if the brilliant landscape in front of him sicklied over beneath a falling veil of pallid green. He shut his eyes to steady himself, and, in doing so, sank down, like one struck, into a chair. The alarmed monkey ran from one to another, and peered up into their faces, and moaned.

"Is it the disappointment of his love?" thought Madame de Mongelas for one eager moment. But she knew it could not be that. Yet she could not have understood what it really was. She could not, with her so different education and experience, have comprehended what her revelation meant to the Protestant lad, the disciple of Tante Suze, the quondam student of theology. She could not have realised how the folly of his passion suddenly changed in his imagination into the very heinousness of blackest crime. Nor can we reason about these moral issues with logical sequence. It was but a few weeks, be it remembered, since a moment of madness had thrown him into the arms of Madame de Mongelas.

At that hour he had reasoned neither of right nor of wrong. Then, as soon as had come the first pricks of compunction, he had told himself that he was bound to her, as he was only too willing to be. And no later deception had altered this his conviction that he owed himself, soul and body, to the woman to whom he had devoted his innocence. Practically, and without much religious or philosophic argument, but trusting simply to the instincts of his honour, he had worked out the problem of his destiny exactly as Tante Suze had done. There was nothing between them but that terrible impulse of crime in the old woman's heart. And even that he could understand better, since he had heard the story of her own life from his father, and knew what full consciousness of horror was hers when she strove by one supreme, though frantic, effort to rescue him from the very edge of the abyss.

He understood it. For he knew now that her whole life had been one long self-renunciation for the holiness of the cause she deemed herself called to defend. He had learned from his father, how that father, not baffled by a first refusal, had repeatedly returned to the charge, and that she, through the succeeding years, had ever met him with the same unvarying answer: "What have I to do with you? Go back to your wife." And she loved the man whom she thus thrust from her. He could not doubt that she

had loved him. How had she not devoted herself to Arnout Oostrum for his father's sake!

He, with the light of these thoughts full upon him, had offered all he had to offer to Madame de Mongelas.

And she? "I am a married woman already," she said. "My husband is still alive."

"There is a wickedness, then," he said to himself, "from which there is no escape."

Madame de Mongelas broke a silence she could no longer endure. "Hush, Jacko!" she said. "Quiet! We make nothing good, child, by moaning. It is only the monkeys who do that. It seems, Arnout, that my dear husband in Paris knows something of your wishes, or forestalls them. I received a letter from my notary this morning, in which he tells me that Monsieur de Mongelas is about to bring a suit against me for divorce."

"I can understand it," he said sullenly, without lifting his eyes from the floor.

"You?" she cried, blazing out at him. "What do you understand? What do you know? You insult me, and that without reason! Before you ventured to judge of my conduct, you should at least have made the acquaintance of Monsieur de Mongelas."

"I do not——" he began.

"Silence! Listen to me. I am not going to speak ill of my husband. He is as other men. I loved him—sufficiently. That does not matter. They do not take it into account. It is the wife's duty, as the husband's pleasure is to be false. And he—and he—— Go, sir, I forgive you because of your ignorance. And because you, at least, think honourably, differently. If my husband had thought as you do, Arnout, you would never have known Dorine de Mongelas. The happier for me." She said the last words very softly. Her voice lingered, as it dropped over them. Had he heard them? She fancied not.

"No," she said, "we will not marry. When the first excitement was over, it would be too ridiculous. You and I, we have had our time. It was a good time while it lasted. But it is over. You would be finding out your mistake too soon. I fear me—do you know—that you have found it out already, before you made it. Well, so much the more beautiful of you. I am proud that you made it. And now we must let it pass over, and pass out of sight. I was just going to tell you, when you surprised me by your proposal, that I must start for Paris as soon as possible, to find out what is the meaning of this last freak of M. de Mongelas. I was thinking of leaving to-morrow morning, but I think I had perhaps better go to-night,

This then, *mon cher chevalier*, had better be the last time we meet."

He started up. "You desert me!" he cried. "You leave me to myself. To my loneliness. You have robbed me of everything I possessed. And now you leave me—naked and alone."

Dorine smiled. "Always tragic!" she said. "It is in the blood. I leave you to a new-found father—ah, you see that I know—who appears to be very wealthy, and to loving friends who will welcome the prodigal's return. I, now—if you ask to what I return—— But let us rather speak of matters of interest. It is always a sad thing to say good-bye. And now I want you, Arnout, to say good-bye very tenderly to me. For the future—what is it but a recollection? The past was a hope."

"I cannot say good-bye," said Arnout fiercely.

"Yes, you can. For it is the last thing left to say. Good-bye, Arnout." And she held out her hand.

"It is true, then?" he cried, as if suddenly awakening. "This is a farewell. You dismiss me from your presence, from your life, from your heart? You bid me go—and for good? You are tired of me, and you wish to return to the noble, your husband? It is your answer, madame, to the offer of my whole existence, which I made you a few moments ago? I thank you for the answer."

"Yes, Arnout, some day you will thank me for the answer. And now let us part friends. Farewell!"

"At least," he said hastily, "before we separate for ever, you must allow me, madame, to regulate our business connections." He drew from his pocket the envelope his father had placed there. "You have been so kind," he went on gravely, and without a shade of a sneer in his voice, "to make me considerable advances of money to meet the expenses of our trip. You will allow me, before you dismiss me, to reimburse them, madame." And he laid the packet down on the table.

She grew white to the lips. "You brought this with you?" she stammered. "When you came up to me? I cannot understand."

"No," he retorted hastily. "It is an accident. I had the sum ready. I had just received it. I have long desired—I have always expected to return it."

Madame de Mongelas slowly took the paper in her hands. She opened it, and drew out the bundle of bank-notes it contained.

"The American's money!" she said scornfully. She scanned them carelessly. "It is not even enough," she said with yet more withering scorn.

In his trouble Arnout mistook her meaning. "I deeply regret it," he said, "and if you will only mention any sum you require——"

She lifted her eyes to his face, and, for the first

time, their glances met. He stopped. A beautiful crimson mantled over her proud face and neck.

"Here," she said, "Jacko!"

And with an imperial movement of disdain, she flung the bank-notes—in a fluttering bundle—to the ape.

With a screech of delight the little monster sprang upon them. For tearing up tissue paper was a favourite amusement of his. He jumped out on to the balcony with his precious burden.

Arnout stood by the great window, straight and still, every nerve in tension with the effort to keep calm, too proud to lift a saving hand, yet not trusting himself even to stir a finger in the yearning to prevent the cruel waste before his eyes. Hanging out on the parapet, against the wide sparkle of lake and sky, in the glowing golden sunlight, the little grey monkey sat coolly tearing up, one by one, the heap of papers he held between his knees, and casting their fragments to the winds. They fluttered for a moment, and then fell, one by one, among the bushes, in the basins of the fountains by the terrace down below, here and there, right and left. Madame de Mongelas lay back upon her sofa, playing listlessly with the glistening jet upon her dress, her eyes fixed immovably on Arnout's face.

She waited till the last scrap had sailed out of

sight and Jacko was hunting for more. Then she said: "Go. It is enough."

He moved towards the door. "No," he said, "let us not part thus, Dorine. If I have wronged you, it was not intentionally. Forgive me whatever you have to forgive."

"I will try to," she said proudly.

"I said just now that I was awake. But since then so much has happened. Perhaps I am not awake. I shall understand when that time comes."

"Oh yes," she said, "you are awake. Perhaps, Arnout, if you had still been dreaming—— Good-bye. And, if *I* may say it, God bless you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, and closed the door.

She sprang after him, as he did so, with an almost involuntary movement, and bending forward, stood listening to his retreating steps. She stood thus for several minutes, after those steps had died away in the distance, and then, suddenly, she sank down—the graceful, haughty woman—in an attitude of utter abandonment by the door, and, covering her face with her hands, she wept as she had never wept before, except on that terrible evening when she had taken her husband's valet to see a screaming farce at the Folies Dramatiques. The little monkey threw his arms round her neck, and strove to draw the

fingers from her eyes and peep into them, but she would not let him. She pushed him away, again and again, so roughly that he at length retired into a corner and crouched there, watching her intently, his face puckered up into a sob.

After several moments, however, she recovered herself in so far that she could push back the hair from her brow. She looked across at Jacko. "You are all that is left of it," she said. "Come here."

CHAPTER XVI.

AND THE MAN'S.

WHEN Arnout had sufficiently recovered himself, he went back to his father.

He could not, as yet, understand the experience he had just passed through. With the horror of her confession still fresh upon him, he recoiled from the woman whom he had adored throughout a brief fever of enjoyment, but he was angry with her, none the less, for what he considered her desertion. She was tired of him; she was going back to Paris, glad, probably, of this valid excuse of her lawsuit. And he, heroically sacrificing all his hopes and his aspirations, he had flung everything he possessed at her feet. And she spurned away the treasure with a trip of the toe.

"So she is to leave for Paris to-night," said his father complacently. "Well, well, it could not be better, all things considered. I am no enemy of diversion, as I have repeatedly assured you. You will not find in me a stern, implacable parent, who

has never been a young man himself. No, no, youth must have its fling; I know that. Sow its wild oats, and so on. No, not 'sow on'—eh? He, he! That was very good. There comes a time for leaving off. And you mustn't make your furrows too deep, or you'll never get rid of them. They'll come out on your forehead. You were very near making a fool of yourself with that woman, Arnout. You really must forgive my saying so. And you may consider yourself lucky that I turned up when I did. Well, you're out of it now, and I congratulate you. Take a bit of advice from a man that has seen the world. Love long, and far and wide—but don't love too deep."

"I think, sir," said Arnout stiffly, "that as the matter is now settled, we might more agreeably talk of something else."

"I am most willing to do so," said Mr. van Donseelaar pleasantly. "I should suggest that we also quit this place as soon as convenient, and that we go—not to Paris; well, well, never mind—but to Rome. It was my intention, had I found you in Holland and thought you a suitable companion, to propose that we should undertake a journey through Europe together. There is nothing that forms a man so much—unless it be a little escapade like yours. The only difference now is, that you started before me, and that I have had to catch you up. We might

go down into Italy, and then try Egypt and the Pyramids, coming back by the Holy Land and Constantinople. I should like to see 'Jedoodledum.' Wonderful soil for raising *stock*. Only place in the whole world, I fancy, that ever licked New York in the manufacture of business men!"

Arnout did not answer. Here, certainly, was an escape offered to him, beyond his wildest dreams, an escape from himself, and all the misery of his surroundings. To travel had always been one of his fondest aspirations, the fonder, perhaps, because unattainable, as they know who have dined for five successive months at the same table d'hôte. And now the full delight of the most splendid of all journeys was opened up to him, in a panorama of expectation before his dazzled eyes. He almost forgot for a moment the dark valley, through which he had just descended. The clouds broke apart, as the darkest clouds are apt to do most suddenly, and the sunlight of new hope poured in upon his soul. Rome—Jerusalem—Constantinople. Each word called up a new phantasmagoria of the purest, the most beautiful pleasures, untroubled fruition such as he had never experienced yet. He felt that life was not all done for him, as he had fancied ten minutes ago. No, on the contrary, it was only just beginning. It was about to unroll itself before him, in all its variegated delights. It was his world that had been so

little. The great world was wide, and full of capabilities, and beautiful still. And the whole deliciousness of wealth was borne in upon his mind.

"Yes," said his father. "I like you. I am sure we shall get on well together. And I am pleased with you for the prompt manner in which you have put a stop to this little romance, as soon as I pointed out to you that it was working round into a tragedy. It shows that you are not a duffer, Arnout. There's many a young fellow has seen more of the world that would not have extricated himself so well. You start with your brains in the right place, but you must develop them by experience, and you'll have need of them, if you're to be my heir. There's no man requires to be so wide awake as a rich one, especially in our part of the world. The poor man, if he goes to sleep, risks possible gain, but the rich one, if he does it, risks positive loss. All the same, best be wide-awake, any way. I shouldn't have been a rich man now, if I hadn't looked out sharp, when the moment came. And how do you like the idea, Arnout, you pauper, of being heir to a big lump of money all of a sudden? Don't it seem like a fairy tale?"

"I like it of course," said Arnout. "How should I not do so? It would not be in flesh and blood to prefer being poor."

"No, I should think not. That's all rot about the pleasures of poverty—

"Make me contented with my lot
Whate'er I've got, or haven't got."

It doesn't do in the nineteenth century, whatever they may have thought out in Palestine, where I suppose a fellow don't want any clothing and can feel comfortable on an olive a day. Now olives give me an appetite. And as for Diogenes, it's all very beautiful, but give me a Dutchman. Our fathers found out long ago, that the only kind of ton* to make a man thoroughly comfortable is the kind they manufacture in Holland, my boy."

"It takes a long time to produce them in Holland. Are they made more quickly in America, sir?"

"That depends. A sharp man makes them quickly—sometimes. And a dull man never makes them at all. Now, in Holland, any fool can get rich by just sticking on in his father's shoes. Down west, where I made my money, most people's fathers had no shoes for 'em to stick in."

"The experiences must be interesting," said Arnout indifferently.

* "Ton," similar to the English "plum" but in much more general use, is a Dutch expression for a hundred thousand guilders.

"I believe you." Mr. van Donselaar crossed and uncrossed his legs, and stretched himself out comfortably. "Yes, my son, I could tell you some rum stories, if I choose. I think you'd find your old father knows what's what. The man must get up early that wants to take me in."

"I do not doubt it," said Arnout. His indifference stung the old gentleman to talk on. He would show the boy what mettle he was made of, that he was not a personage to be slighted like this.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "Now, many a man would not have availed himself of my opportunity even when it offered. Had I not done so, I should have been poor to this day. Some people would have called it a fluke. It just depends often whether you have the sense to open your mouth for manna where others see merely rain. And we reap a better crop, as a rule, off the stupidity of other people's brains than off the cleverness of our own. Now, *my* manna was a stretch of land that looked just like other land; only, there might have been gold in it, you see."

"And was there?" asked Arnout, watching a bird.

The old gentleman winked, and looked wonderfully knowing. He blew a long, fragrant cloud of smoke into the air. And then he said: "There

may have been, and there may not have been. That question remains to be answered to this day."

"But then how did you make so much money by it?" asked Arnout, suddenly observant.

"By *not* looking for the gold," answered Donse-laar triumphantly. "It is certain that somebody who peered into the ground, when he had no business to, and when it still belonged to me, came across some bits of ore, and if that somebody bought the ground from me, it was his business to know why."

"How interesting!" said Arnout, sitting up. "I wish you would tell me all about it."

"There is not much to tell, boy. As I said to you, the land was mine, and I didn't quite know what to do with it. I had won it, if you want the exact particulars, at a chance game of euchre in a railway-car. Gold-prospecting costs a lot of money, as you may have heard, and I hadn't any money to sink in shafts. So I waited and 'lay low,' as they say nowadays. A lot of fellows were loafing round, looking for gold, and some of them came my way and pottered about my bit of property. Well, I watched them, and said nothing, and one day one of them came to me and offered me a good bit of money for my land. He wanted it for sheep-pasture, he told me. I said it would do excellently for sheep-pasture, and he could have it, if he gave me double

the sum he proposed. 'Done,' says he like a flash. 'Done' he was."

"That is extraordinary," said Arnout. "What made him pay so heavy a price?"

"Well—as I tell you—he had found gold here and there, when he came fooling around. It wasn't any business of mine whether he would find more. You don't want gold for sheep-pastures."

"But if you knew there was gold?"

"But if I knew nothing about it? I knew there was gold where he looked. No one better than I."

"I understand," said Arnout, still extremely interested. "It is certainly very clever. You knew that it was where he looked for it, because you had put it there."

"He had no business to come looking for it, wherever it might happen to be. And if he did not find any more, after the land became his, what did that matter? He had bought it for sheep-pastures, you see."

"I see. It is very clever," said Arnout thoughtfully.

"Ah, you have to be clever in that part of the country. There's no alternative but falling into another man's pit or digging one yourself. As to falling into your own pit, you don't catch 'em doing that in a hurry."

"It is very clever," said Arnout abstractedly.

"And that was the starting-point of all your good fortune, you say?"

"Naturally. It was only the original capital that I had been waiting for. Once supply me with that, and you could trust me to increase it."

Another long pause ensued. Such pauses were common between them. At last Arnout said gravely: "I hope, sir, that the original game of cards was fair."

Mr. van Donselaar laughed heartily—perhaps a little too heartily. "Very good," he said, "very funny! Oh no, I can make my conscience easy on that score. I have earned my money fairly enough; few men with as large a fortune could say as much. Not that I am wealthy from an American point of view, but I should do for Holland. Oh yes, undoubtedly, I should do for Holland. And so I think my brother Diederick will say, when we get together and have a talk about his Dorothy and you. Yes, though I don't know her, and though it seems to be a subject you avoid, I've set my heart, I don't know why, upon it's being Dorothy."

Again there was a silence, and then Arnout got up and said: "I think, if you will allow me, I will go in. Good afternoon."

"All right. Do as you like. Ta, ta! But when shall I see you again?"

"I don't know," answered Arnout, walking rapidly away.

"And we are to decide about leaving either to-night or to-morrow, en route for Rome!"

"Oh, better leave to night," said Arnout, and turned into the hotel door.

He had three napoleons in his pocket, so much he knew. These coins and his simple gold watch were all the valuables he possessed. How far would they take him on the way back to Holland?

He must get back to his own country, to a land of honourable men and good women. He must find honest work for his hands to do. He must escape, at all cost, from the world in which he had lost himself, a world where men's loves deserted them, and men's fathers turned out swindlers who owed all their fortune to a lie. He must go home. Had he no longer a home to go to? He must find Tante Suze, and explain himself to her, and intreat her to explain herself to him. All would be clear, if there could but be an explanation. If he could but get back out of the world where things were topsy-turvy, into a world he understood.

He went up into his room and wrote a long and clumsy letter to his father, in which he explained that he could not accept the sonship which had been offered him, and furthermore expressed a regret that he had incurred a debt which he would strive to repay. There had been three thousand francs in

the envelope which Arnout had passed on to Madame de Mongelas. A large sum, and not to be refunded in a hurry, however pleasant it might seem to be able to do so. Arnout took a considerable time over his letter, and then he went downstairs and looked for the director. He had made friends with the director of the hotel, a refined and kind-hearted individual, and he had frequently had a chat with him in his office or out on the terrace. Perhaps the director could help him. He could not do better than try.

"Monsieur," he said, "I am in a bad dilemma. You must extricate me. I have had—to be frank with you—a tiff with my sister, who is going back to Paris without me. I want to get to Cologne, but I have spent my own money, and I could not think, under the circumstances, of appealing to her. I thought perhaps that you might know of somebody who was in need of a travelling companion of some sort—some invalid or something, I don't rightly know myself—who would take me a good piece of the way for such services as I could give in return."

"My dear sir," answered the director, "borrow a small sum from me, and repay it when you can."

He was sorry to lose his guests, but he fancied he understood all about Arnout, and he felt anxious to come to his relief.

"No, no," said Arnout, reddening. "You are very

good. And I am obliged to you. But I want you to think, or inquire—is there anything of the kind, do you know?”

“As it happens,” replied the director, “I heard from my uncle at Menaggio the other day, that there was a young German gentleman there, who is very ill and who was desirous of finding somebody to travel with. It was only to Frankfort, but that, perhaps, would be sufficient for what you require?”

“Yes, yes,” said Arnout hastily. “Do you think he would have me?”

“It is more than a week ago. Perhaps he is long gone. But if he is not, and if he has waited all this time in vain, he might prefer taking your journey upon him to incurring continued expense at the hotel. Shall I telegraph: ‘Companion offers, if expenses paid?’ It can do no harm to try.”

“Yes, do so, if you please,” said Arnout, striving to be calm. “When can I have the answer?”

“In an hour or two.”

“That will do capitally. You are awfully good. I am very much obliged to you, monsieur.”

“Ce n’est pas la peine, monsieur. If only the man be not gone!”

Arnout slipping out of the office and intending to creep upstairs again, ran straight against his father.

“Hullo!” cried the old gentleman, “where are

you coming to? Now, look sharp, Arnout. We shall have to decide about this departure of ours. When is it to take place?"

Arnout bethought him of his letter, carefully written. He had it in his pocket. Should he take it out, hand it over, and fly? After all, it was manlier to settle the matter by word of mouth than to write a long vindication and run away.

"Let me answer you, sir, immediately," he said, as he drew his father into the empty reading-room. "My departure will be as soon as possible, but I think we had better not go together. In fact, after what you have told me this afternoon about the means by which you have possessed yourself of your fortune, I have resolved not to accept the proposal you have made me. It is not for me to express an opinion on the subject, but I would rather go away."

"But, Arnout," cried Mr. van Donselaar, visibly excited, "you have misunderstood me. It is absurd. It is impossible. Don't you see that I never told the man there was gold? And that I was not responsible for his attempt to outwit me? I treated him fairly enough, and if his little scheme did not succeed, it was merely a case of the biter bit. I had an exceptional fool to deal with, to tell the truth, or the whole thing would have fallen through on both sides."

"You put the gold there," said Arnout firmly.

"Don't, pray, let us discuss it. I dare say, from your point of view you were quite right. But I fear we should never agree. I am obliged to you for your kindness. Perhaps I have been too long without a father, and I dare say you have been too long without a son. It would be no use beginning, only to draw back in a few months."

"We might try, Arnout," said Donselaar softly.

"No, no; it would be no use."

"Do you mean that this is really your decision? That for some stupid freak of boyish conceit (for it is conceit) you are going to give up a fortune of twenty thousand dollars a year?"

"Yes, sir," said Arnout.

But old Mr. van Donselaar would not so soon give up his newly found son. He drew him into the embrasure of a window and reasoned with him, pointing out the advantage of wealth and the discomforts of poverty. And he showed him how legitimate, from a business point of view, was the manœuvre by which the land had been sold. He was very patient and very plausible. Arnout listened intently. It was a hard struggle for the young fellow.

"I do not deny," he reiterated, "that you may do as you will. But let me do as I prefer, also. And, sir, I prefer not to touch this money. I am sincerely sorry it should be so, but I cannot help it. Discussions are useless. Let me go."

"Then I am really to understand that this is a final decision? You are going away?"

"I am going away."

"And where to, if I may inquire—to Rome alone? Or is there another Madame de Mongelas?"

"I am going back home, sir—alone."

"D—n you," cried Donselaar, his fury breaking loose. "Go. And where is the money I gave you a few hours ago? Is that to pay for your trip?"

Arnout drew out his pocket-book and produced the letter he had written. He tore it open and extracting a loose scrap of paper, laid it before Mr. van Donselaar's astonished, but indignant eyes. It was an I.O.U.

"The money is gone," he said. "I am very sorry for it. I cannot repay you, but I shall do so as soon as ever I possibly can."

The pseudo-American took the paper and carefully hid it away in his breast-pocket. He smiled an ugly smile.

"We shall see," he said. "We must hope so. But I fear that this little amusement of son-hunting will prove to have cost me three thousand francs."

"No," answered Arnout moodily. "I do not think so. But I cannot repay you before—before I can. Some day, be sure, you will have your money. Have patience until then. You can count interest, if you like."

"Thank you," said his father. "You are very good."

At this moment, the director came in with the answer to his telegram. He had received it sooner than he had expected. He held it out towards Arnout.

"If he can come immediately, good."

Arnout laid the telegram before his father. "There, sir, you have my final decision. I have nothing to add to it, but farewell."

"Boy," cried Mynheer van Donselaar, starting up. "Boy, you are mad! Consider your own future! You are mad! It is impossible!——" But Arnout had slipped away.

"And what, then, is the use of all my money?" said van Donselaar, clenching his fists before him on the table and staring down at the I.O.U. with "Arnout Oostrum" sprawling across the paper. He sat motionless for some time, staring thus in front of him. And then he sighed heavily. "D—n the money," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

ARNOUT travelled back to Frankfort in attendance on his invalid, and there left him. They were not sorry to part. It had scarcely been a pleasant journey. The German was very ill, and his illness had by no means improved the natural acerbity of his temper. He was one of those who instinctively separate the whole human race into the two classes of superiors and inferiors, the people to whom you must be polite and the people who must be polite to you. And so he unconsciously assumed towards every individual with whom he came in contact the attitude of bully or bullied one. His whole life had dwindled down into a hereditary conjugation of the verb to bully in all its active and passive forms. He was an officer. And as he paid Arnout's ticket, and as, moreover, Arnout represented that object of envious contempt to every well-regulated German mind, a "Dutch bloater," he hectored him as much as the young Hollander would allow.

And Arnout proved unexpectedly meek. The German thought that it was because he was afraid

of him, and we need not grudge the sick man this illusion, for it made him supremely happy. But Arnout, never having been in a menial position before, felt unable properly to regulate the degrees of proportion between enduring a man's insolent affability and pitching him out of the window. And he imagined, for so he had always been told in a country where the Germans are both feared and despised, that all Prussian officers were inevitably unendurable. A mistake; for when they have passed the age of thirty, they often develop into most charming men, even though they never quite appreciate in political discussions those ideas of mine and thine, of right and might, which are nowadays generally accepted, at least in theory, among most civilised communities. It is too much, perhaps, to expect that from a successful military autocrat in an age of land-grabbing. But Arnout may be easily forgiven his one-sidedness, for his knowledge of these matters was principally derived from a frequent perusal of the *Fliegende Blätter*, the South German comic paper, which brings week after week, hidden away under the form of comedy, a tale of military cruelty and oppression, enough to make every mother in Christendom weep tears of blood. At least, so it read to Arnout, but then we must not forget that Arnout came of a nation which has long been impatient of all authority and which considers even the

preservation of order and security in the public streets an oppression not to be endured.

Unable, then, to establish a proper limit, he calmly put up with his "employer's" impertinences, and remembered that railway trains travel fast. And he was in no mood for further conflicts of any kind. He desired nothing more, for the moment, than repose, to fly back from all things surrounding him, into himself, that in the loneliness now fast forming around him he might find his own heart again. He was angry—angry with Madame de Mongelas, angry with his father, angry with Dorothy, angry even with Tante Suze, though here his anger was fast breaking up into a yearning for reconciliation in their mutual guilt. But, above all things, he was angry with himself, and the terror and disgust which the knowledge of his mistress's secret had brought upon him still held him as in a vice. He loathed himself and the deed he had done, but it was with scornful, bitter loathing, rather than repentance. He was angry with himself for being angry. He did not want to be it, neither as regarded the others nor as regarded himself. The world was out of joint, and what was he to set it right? And yet, what was he, either, to break the laws of Heaven and earth? He must get back, back on to the rails, if possible. He sat in the train staring out into the swiftly shifting landscape with hard and hopeless eyes. What did it matter to

him if the German grumbled because he had not arranged the cushions aright?

And, then, gradually, softer thoughts came over him. They came with the constant memory of Dorothy, the cruel maiden who had driven him to his ruin. He had ever loved to think so, and yet the idea would not let him rest. Was it true that she had really been to blame? We are always willing to hold others responsible for our sorrows—it is pleasant; but can we truthfully convince ourselves that they sin in our sins? And Jakob te Bakel's words in the Cologne cathedral echoed once more through the deepest recesses of his heart: "She loves you, and you have deserted her." They had never been completely silenced since that day when first they were spoken.

He must get back on to the rails again. But how? Time must show him, and he must try to understand. All these difficulties and distractions, these wrongs and rights, were too puzzling and irritating, like a tangled skein. Best get away from the unusual, escape into the everyday.

The career in the Church, which was to have been his, was now closed to him. Concerning that, he was resolved. He did not doubt that people would condone his fault, describe it as a boyish infatuation, advise him to live it down, and to prepare for a life of usefulness in the ministry. But he

would not listen to them; no, not for a moment. His mind was made up. His own horror of himself was too vivid to allow him to hesitate. Long enough had he lived a lie. And whatever change the future might bring in his convictions, to become a teacher of the Gospel, a pattern and a testimony—no.

He must try to obtain a situation as a clerk in Amsterdam. The idea was unpalatable to him, but he embraced it with energy. In his talks with his father he had felt that he might perhaps develop a certain aptitude for business, for honest business, manly business, the hard-working strain to make fair profit, and to make it frequently. It was all very vague as yet, but he would try, and see what came of it. He was too old to begin; well, he must not rest content to be backward longer than necessary. He saw himself, in his imagination, tied down to a desk, day after day, from morning to night, scribbling figures. The prospect was not very inviting, but he accepted it. For one resolution rose paramount in his mind over all other thoughts. He must never be dependent on Tante Suze again. Never, never on any one. He must earn his own bread. And he must repay the debt he had contracted towards his father. His cheeks burned as he recalled the beneficence of Madame de Mongelas.

His thoughts of the future were very sombre ones. He did not much mind their being sombre.

It would be too much to say that he revelled in it, but he accepted the fact with a grave sense of the fitness of things.

Ah, well, we are strange discords, and the ground-tone is always self.

Had he been more presumptuous and seen clearer, he might perhaps have discerned, in the gloom of things that are, a great house in the coffee-trade, left under the guidance of an old man, wearying for his rest in the country, and of a young fellow who plays the violin too well for an office desk—and, in the brightness of things to be—a modest post in that house for a man able and eager to work his way upwards, to whom the old chief of the firm has said: “When you gave up that fortune acquired by falsehood you did a great and noble thing, a thing which every true man of business would delight in, and for which I, whose every penny was honestly got at, honour and love you. But we cannot have what we let go. The years alone slowly bring expiation, and when you earn enough by your own exertions——”

The dream fades away, even as we dream it, and Arnout, looking out into the awakening morning, sees himself with industrious eyes, and brow on which sorrow has left its mark, at work at his office-desk.

He reached the little Wyk station late in the

evening; he had purposely timed himself so as to avoid the tell-tale light of day. He was almost penniless. His money had barely sufficed to bring him on from Frankfort third-class.

He slipped from the carriage and, avoiding, as well as he could, the few lights of the station, he hurried away down the deserted road. It was not that he was full of false shame; he would be willing, when the time came, though scarcely without that shrinking which is only natural, to confess his guilt before men, but first, and before all things, he must get back home, get into the old surroundings, and if he could only become his old self again, then, surely, he would understand.

As if we could ever do so! As if Arnout Oostrum, of all men, would ever be his old self again!

His heart leaped with a strange medley of feeling at the thought that in a few moments he would once more stand face to face with Tante Suze. Between them would lie, like a barrier, the constant thought of her crime and of his. Both had explanations—ay, and expiations—enough to fall back upon, but, even if these sufficed for the other, they would not suffice for the one who could appeal to them. How would they meet? And what could he say to the woman who had loved him with such an all-absorbing love, and who, like him, had erred, and erred in vain? He could find no answer to the question, however

often he pondered it. Yet he felt that he must get back to her. The sooner, the better. And he hurried down the lane.

He turned the corner, by the jasmine-bushes, from whence, by daylight, you could discern the house. It was too dark now to do so—a soft, still darkness, without wind or stars, the very melancholy of night, lay lightly on the trees. He ran forward now, borne onward by the tempest of his own uncertainty. The next moment lay before him as a vast black question, the answer to which would embrace, so it seemed to him, in a sudden clearness, both the future and the past. He ran onward. Then, in the darkness, the white shape of the house became vaguely visible. And he stopped, when he saw it, smitten with a sudden hesitation, a nameless dread. A foolish inclination came over him to run back—to the other end of the world—never to come near the place again. And then he conquered, with an effort, what was left in him of false assumption and walked on with firm tread to the gate.

The little cottage was dark. He tried the latch, but it would not work. The gate was locked. He looked up at the forlorn windows in amazement; never, as long as he could remember, through the fifteen years they had lived together, had his aunt spent a night out of the house. Yet now, surely, she must be away. He shook the inoffensive gate re-

peatedly, in his anxiety and his disappointment. For he suddenly realised, with all the vehemence of failure, how his whole nature had been strung up for this meeting. He could not bear the recoil now that the tension was unexpectedly relaxed. He stumbled miserably along the neat box-hedge in the darkness, and lifted his eyes from time to time towards the dark line of the building and wondered.

The window of his own little room shone out curtainless, with a black shimmer in its glass like that of deep water under a lowering sky. The house looked down upon him, as if big with a secret it was striving to tell. And the night was soft and still.

And then he saw, what he had not seen till now: a board stuck upon a pole in the middle of the central geranium-bed which adorned the garden-plot.

He could not make out what was written upon it; and yet only one thing, he felt, could be written up thus. He jumped over the low gate and ran to the post. He drew matches from his pocket and, striking a light, he read by its momentary flash the words he expected yet dreaded to find—

“TO BE LET OR SOLD.”

He dropped the match from his hand, and it seemed to him as if, in the darkness, he were standing by an open grave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FATTED CALF.

It was many minutes before Arnout roused himself to turn away. Then he shook himself, like a dog awakening from sleep, and crept back to the gate, and slowly climbed over it.

During all those minutes a figure on the other side of the road, under the shadow of the trees, had stood watching him with quiet expectation. And as he let himself down on the other side of the gate, Jakob te Bakel stepped forward and laid a hand on his arm.

"Arnout," he said, "she isn't dead. You may thank God she is not. Come home with me, and I will tell you all about it."

Arnout suffered the other to lead him down the lane towards the parsonage. They walked on in unbroken silence except for one interchange of rapid question and answer.

"Is she ill?" said Arnout.

"No," answered Jakob, "she is not ill."

Arnout did not speak again till they reached the

parsonage door, but then, as Jakob limped aside to let him pass, he stopped.

"I will come with you," he said, "but not if you preach to me, against your own conviction. You may reproach me as much as you like, Jakob, but it must be Jakob te Bakel who speaks and not the Dominé. Don't think me unkind, Jakob, but I can't listen to set phrases. Not to-night. I am unreasonable. But I am trying to understand."

"I shall not preach to you," said Jakob sternly; "come with me." And they went in.

He made the wanderer as comfortable as he could, materially, but there was a reserve in his manner which struck a chill to Arnout's heart. The minister could not forgive his former friend immediately, and be kind to him and take him to his heart as if nothing had happened. Something had happened. It was impossible to ignore it. It would be reprehensible to do so. The women would probably make enough of the prodigal, and pet him, and feast him. Women always dearly enjoy a sinner, even when he is penitent. But he, the parson, was not going to give way to any such false sensibility. Men are made of robuster impressions, and their feelings can outlive many a change of front. Iniquity was iniquity, and must not be called virtue because we happened to find it in a repentant soul. Better than speak such falsehood, keep silence and go your

way. And Jakob, whose heart was overflowing with pity for the prodigal, fastened down his face into severe lines of what he thought was neutrality, and set bread and meat before him without a word.

But Arnout pushed them away. "Tell me," he said, "what has happened to her?"

And Jakob told him the story of their journey to Paris.

"And so," he concluded, "when we came back, the first thing that she did was to look for a situation as housekeeper. She has found one—in Amsterdam. She preferred Amsterdam, so as to be near Dorothy; for false pride she has none. It is evident, of course, though she refuses to answer any questions, that she has sacrificed what money she had to the Vicomte de Mongelas to obtain what she calls your soul's salvation. It is a madness, and I have ceaselessly told her so; but it is one of those mad-nesses which make the angels weep, even more than they cause devils to grin."

Arnout had sat silent under the torture which the other was inflicting, neither by preference nor unwillingly, but as men do remorselessly what cannot be left undone. After some moments he said—

"And Miss van Donselaar, did I understand you to say she was in Amsterdam?"

Then Jakob told him why Steenevest was empty too. The lamp burned low. They sat opposite

each other, Arnout with the untouched meal beside him. Jakob with his eyes fixed intently on the bowl of his long Gouda-pipe. Their hearts were very near to each other—and very far apart.

“Do you know,” said Jakob presently, “that your aunt Barsselius is dead?”

“No, indeed!” answered Arnout, starting up. “How should I know? When did she die?”

“She had a fit of apoplexy last Monday, and died almost immediately. She has left very little money behind her, for everything goes back to her husband’s family. But what she could dispose of, she has bequeathed to Miss Adelaida Vonk for the maintenance of her dog Bijou. She made a new will, it appears, on the day after Tante Suze had started for Paris. She was very angry with us all for not having effected your return.”

“Well,” answered Arnout, “I can’t help it. I am sure I never wanted her money. And, besides, she was no aunt of mine.”

Poor Tante Suze! She also was no aunt of his. And yet if her sister had withheld from her the little money she had to bestow, it was through his fault, and his alone.

“We will go to Amsterdam to-morrow,” said te Bakel, amid the weary silence. “We will go together and find Tante Suze.”

"Yes," answered Arnout dreamily. "I must speak to Tante Suze. We will go to Amsterdam."

He was miserable, utterly miserable and worn out and confused. He looked across at Jakob te Bakel's long pipe and stern face. He shivered. The room seemed cold to him. And the lamp burned strangely low.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARNOUT UNDERSTANDS.

MEJUFFROUW Varelkamp sat in her neat little housekeeper's room. She had obtained a situation immediately; indeed, with her references and accomplishments, a number of applications had come to her as soon as her purpose became known. She had decided to fix her choice on an elderly maiden lady, like herself, an invalid, to whom she could be housekeeper, nurse and companion combined. And she was not unhappy among her new surroundings, as long as she had plenty to do; her occupations took her away from her less agreeable thoughts. She knew that she was not sorry it should be so, even while she sought to return to them. And, moreover, the object for which she strove was about to be attained. She dreaded success, and, probably, when it was achieved, she would regret it. But as long as she was working for it, she rejoiced in the word.

This morning's post had brought her a couple of letters. They were spread out before her; she sat gazing at them even now. The one was written

in a graceful feminine hand and its contents ran as follows:

“MADEMOISELLE,

“I send you back your boy. Do not question longer why I retained him, or why I send him back. He is willing to return; let that suffice you. And I am not unwilling he should go. I can feel with you, for I also have learnt something of the bitterness of loss. I return to my husband, and you will hardly, I presume, insist, under these circumstances, on my marriage with Arnout, for I cannot suppose that your unbending morality will approve of two husbands any more than of half an one. Two, it would be too droll! And M. le Procureur Général would lock me up for bigamy, and then I should have none. Adieu, mademoiselle; forgive me the wrong I have done you. Be sure that we suffer for our evil actions; and, sometimes, in those austere Protestant prayers of yours, which seem made for human sin, but not for human folly, remember the name of

“DORINE DE MONGELAS.”

The second consignment could scarcely be called a letter. It was a parcel which had come by letter-post. On being opened, it had revealed, under a thick paper covering, a bundle of one thousand franc notes, and of bills of exchange from one commercial

house to another, which had been done up in a lump and flung into a letter-box, like so many worthless pages of gossip. The sum entrusted to the honesty of the post in this happy-go-lucky manner amounted, when everything was counted up, to exactly one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs. There was no letter of explanation of any kind, not even a name, or a pair of initials. The postmark on the wrapper was "Paris;" the direction was written in an unknown hand. The money lay in a heap on the table—and that was all.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp sat looking at it, and counting it over, but she was not thinking of the money—she was thinking of the letter. She wore mourning for her sister, but it was not that only which made her face look even paler and thinner than usual.

The letter was a great trouble to her. It had come upon her unexpectedly. It was heavy with a revelation, from which her soul shrank back, because of its pain and its reproach.

This woman, whom she had attempted to kill—this woman wrote to her, and wrote thus. In the very midst of all Suzanna's scheming to bind Arnout to her, she resigned him; she resigned him because she knew that it was wrong to retain him—resigned him in the sacrifice of her love for his sake. For Suzanna, looking deep down into the letter, read her

story there, and read it right. The money lay there also, but what availed the money? In the moment when she touched success, Dorine de Mongelas had flung it from her because she would not have it at the price.

This truth Suzanna faced as she was accustomed to face truths, unpalatable or otherwise, and try to live them down. She idealized her rival undoubtedly, as it was her nature to do, when once she veered round; and many circumstances of the case were as yet entirely unknown to her. But in the main idea, that the woman whom she had striven to injure so terribly was treating her with great generosity, she was certainly right.

"She is a better woman than I," she said, "she, the wicked creature, is a better woman than I. She lived more truly, more straightly than I. I love him, and I have been working hard to mould his lot as I thought best. And whether the means be right or wrong, what has it mattered to me as long as I could have my own way, and do as I thought best. Yes, that is what it has always been. As I thought best. Even murder, if I deemed that it would attain what I thought best. And if I thought my best was better, then the world was mad, and God was wrong. And what has my wisdom led to from the beginning? I have built up with all my labour the very things I desired to destroy. It was I who sent the lad forth

from his home in the very moment when I was yearning to retain him. And it was I who was welding the chain which must fetter him for ever, at the moment when this woman was loosening it to let him free. Oh, the unwisdom of our wisdom when it begins to doubt of conscience, when it tells us and reasons out to us that evil is not evil because it leads to good. Oh, the wretchedness of going wrong."

She sat for a long time undisturbed in the silence, alone with her thoughts. Then she got up from the table and went to a little cupboard in a corner, and took up a Bible which lay there.

She opened it at the fifty-first Psalm, and she read the Psalm through solemnly, without flinching.

During all these troubled weeks she had calmly continued her reading, but she had shrunk, with a nameless feeling of terror, from that agonized cry of the repentant king of Israel. It was the Psalm which Arnout had whistled on the summer evening when he wandered down the lane, and came upon the carriage upset in the middle of the road. She shrank from it; from the tune, from the words, from the awful, overwhelming, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God!" And now, with its meaning sinking deep into her spirit, with all the reminiscences of that fateful evening returning upon her, she read it through sorrowfully, calmly, from end to end. She

was sitting with the open page before her, when Dorothy van Donselaar came in.

"Do I disturb you, Tante Suze?" said Dorothy.

"No, child, no; and I have great news for you to-day. Can you bear good news as well as evil? Madame de Mongelas has left Arnout, and I doubt not but now he will soon return home."

Dorothy smiled upon Tante Suze, but it was a very subdued smile. And a question remained in her eyes, which the old lady hastened to answer. "She has gone back to her husband," she said. "Poor thing! She has gone back to her husband."

"I am very glad for your sake, Tante Suze," said Dorothy gravely, "that Arnout is coming home. Very glad. I looked in to tell you I have found a good situation for Betje, in the house of a minister who preaches damnation and makes the best of this world while it lasts."

"That is good news also," said Juffrouw Varelkamp, "for it has been very kind of you to take so much trouble about Betje. She will be in such a congenial atmosphere there, that she will refuse to return to me if ever I should have need of her again." She did not press Dorothy. There are things best said by being left unspoken.

But presently she pushed the book towards her, pointing to the open page. "Child," she said, "it is an awful thing to live through the experience which makes

such words possible, but—oh, child, it is a blessed thing, when such words can follow on such a deed.”

“It is Arnout’s psalm,” said Dorothy softly. And then, in the silence, the two women kissed.

“There is a gentleman to see you, juffrouw,” said a maidservant, breaking in upon them. “He won’t give his name, but he says that you know him, and he is coming downstairs.”

Suzanna and Dorothy looked at each other. They knew who the stranger was.

And before any explanation could be offered, Arnout walked into the room, and, pushing out the servant, closed the door.

Then he stood at the far end of the room, unwilling to advance, hesitating what to do or what to say, troubled even more by the unexpected sight of Dorothy van Donselaar, standing against the window by the side of his aunt.

Suzanna came forward a few paces, and then checked herself.

“Don’t come near me,” he cried. “I am not worthy. It is so strange, and things all turn out as they should not, and we cannot put them right. But I am not worthy. I shall never be worthy again, neither of you, nor of her!”

“Oh, Arnout,” burst forth Suzanna, “oh, the wretchedness, the wretchedness of going wrong!”

He hesitated one moment, with his eyes fixed upon her face.

"The wretchedness," she went on vehemently, "of thinking, despite all our conscience tells us, that right can be wrong and wrong be right, because our reason, or our passion, deems it so. Oh, the misery of living false!"

And then, suddenly, Arnout understood.

He sank down on his knees, and stretched forth both his arms towards her, out into the void, into the future, nay, into the very present of love.

"I am not worthy," he cried, "nor of you, nor of her, nor least of all—of God's mercy. Back into the right path. Into the right path. By Thy strength, O Christ!"

THE END.

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